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THE CASE AGAINST LKSINGERS

THE NEW REPUBLIC

And Now The Excitement Starts

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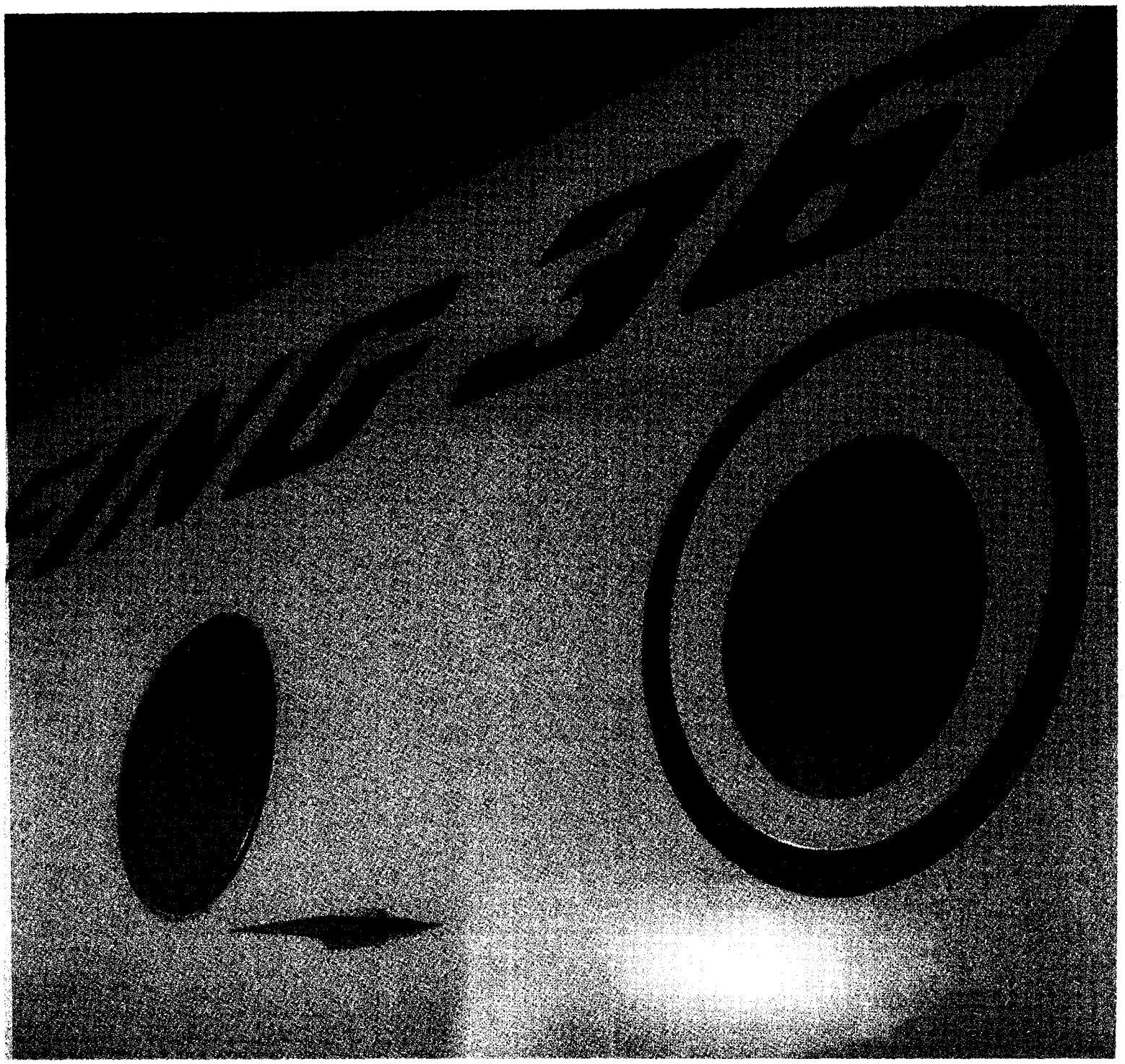

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FROM WASHINGTON

THE FIFTH MAN

It is the liberal nightmare come true. In the twilight of the Reagan era, conservatives finally get a secure lock on the Supreme Court, and begin methodically overturning all the liberal decisions of the postwar era. It certainly looked like the beginning of a judicial auto-da-fé April 25. Lawyers for both sides in *Patterson* v. *McLean Credit Union* thought they were arguing about a minor point of interpretation of a 12-year-old civil rights ruling. Out of the blue, by a 5-4 vote, the Court asked them to come back and discuss whether the whole ruling shouldn't simply be reversed.

This is a nightmare liberals have managed to stave off for almost two decades, ever since Richard Nixon had two Court openings at the beginning of his term. Even before President Reagan's latest appointment of Anthony Kennedy, seven of the nine justices had been chosen by Republican presidents. Yet until now the miraculous unreliability of Supreme Court justices has prevented a clear-cut conservative majority from emerging. (Unreliability works both ways, of course. William Brennan, appointed by Eisenhower, is now one of only two reliable liberal votes, whereas Byron White, appointed by Kennedy, is now pretty reliably conservative.)

Liberals thought they'd pulled the fat from the fire once again last summer when they kept the rigid ideologue Robert Bork off the Court and settled for the seemingly moderate Anthony Kennedy. Conservatives are enjoying the irony: Bork, as solicitor general, successfully argued the pro-civil-rights side of the case Justice Kennedy has now voted to consider overturning. If Bork had been on the Court instead of Kennedy, and if he believed what he said in 1976, this would not have happened.

On the other hand, conservatives have their own, somewhat more sophisticated, nightmare. Since the issue in this case is the meaning of an 1866 statute, not the Constitution, Congress is free to overturn any ruling the Court might make. This year, in the *Grove City* bill (passed over Reagan's veto), Congress reversed a Supreme Court decision giving a narrow interpretation to part of the 1964 Civil Rights Act—in the process, delivering a terrific poke in the eye to President Reagan.

Former Reagan administration official Michael Horowitz argued in a recent speech that the brutal exploitation of a 5-4 Supreme Court majority may backfire on conservatives—just as, in his opinion, excessive use of judicial power in the past backfired on liberals. "But for the abortion decision . . . it is not at all clear that Ronald Reagan would have been nominated or perhaps even elected president. Thus, if we conservatives win our policy victories through fifth votes . . . our conduct will galvanize powerful counterforces."

Thinking this business through is tricky for liberals as well, since the 1976 decision the Court has now indicated its desire to reverse was pretty clearly wrong. At issue is a post-Civil War law saying that "all persons . . . shall have the same right in every State and Territory to make and enforce contracts . . . as is enjoyed by white citizens." For a century, this was assumed to mean simply that the government couldn't have different commercial rules for black and white people. The interpretation the Court accepted in 1976 is that this law forbids racial discrimination by private individuals in all commercial situations. (The case itself involved admission to private school.)

This ruling is tremendously useful to civil rights lawyers, since it fills in some holes in modern civil rights legislation. The 1964 Civil Rights Act, for example, excludes employers of less than 15 people, has a short time limit on filing complaints, and sharply restricts damage awards. The 1866 law, as currently interpreted, has no such limitations. Another post-Civil War statute has been used to overcome limitations in the 1968 fair housing law, which has rigorous procedural requirements and doesn't apply to small boarding houses and clubs.

However, the very usefulness of these ancient statutes shows the implausibility of their current interpretation. The 1964 Civil Rights Act was the culmination of a lengthy and bitter national debate. The

continued on page 42

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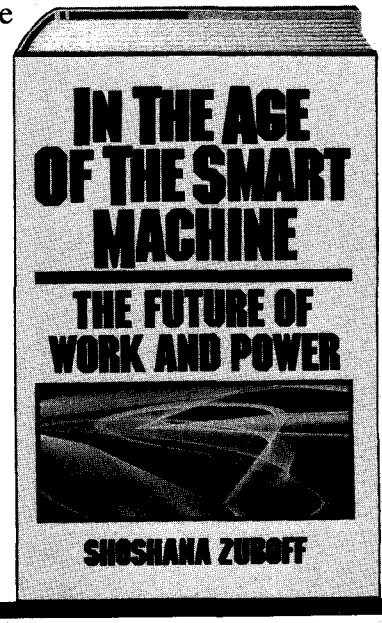

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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CORRESPONDENCE

ELDER STATEMENTS

To the editors:
I used to think America's economic woes were caused by the greedy rich, aided and abetted recently by Reagan's programs. All that belongs to history. The up-to-date story is the Fairlie Conspiracy of the Aged to defraud the rest of us ("Talkin' 'Bout My Generation" by Henry Fairlie, March 28). Their lifestyle is morally offensive. Once honored grandparents who led their community, they now selfishly separate off in retirement enclaves to ride around in golf carts, to consume the goods and services provided by younger people, and to vote against bond issues and taxes for education. They get away from this *dolce far niente* only to take cruises in the Caribbean. What makes Fairlie's picture so astonishing is that this lifestyle is supported by an average annual income of $13,254—the median income the Census Bureau reported for households in 1985 with a head 65 plus. (The median for all households that year was $23,618, some 78 percent larger.) Surely he will want to exercise his reportorial skills to tell us how the old geezers did it.

JACOB FISHER
Sarasota, Florida

To the editors:
Henry Fairlie wrote that "30 percent of the annual federal budget goes to expenditures on people over the age of 65." But the bulk of tax expenditures for the young come from state and local budgets, not that of the federal government. When all tax outlays are considered, we are far from coddling the old at the expense of the young.

THEODOR SCHUCHAT
Washington, D.C.

To the editors:
In getting ready to write this, I achieved a calm frame of mind and got out a legal pad (78 cents at Phar-Mor). Henry Fairlie seems to contend that we need a better class of old people, and they don't make them like that anymore, so let's cut our losses. But instead of positive proposals, he offers character analyses of the elderly: pampered, coddled, and self-centered. Even *Modern Maturity* is "fat and glossy." Well, my wife and I don't have a golf cart. I hardly ever mention having served overseas in World War II, and make a point never to "bleat" about it. I have never voted against a school-bond tax hike, and God knows I'd be afraid to now, as it looks as if Fairlie might find out about it. I *was* struck by his recital of things old people don't need to buy, such as new clothes (I assume it's OK to have the gravy spots dry-cleaned occasionally).

Old people do have a sense of fair play, and recognize that the concept of Social Security may have to be substantially changed. But a one-sided diatribe like Fairlie's will provoke a predictable response: close ranks with Claude and to the barricades!

CLINTON N. TEXTOR
Augusta, Georgia

To the editors:
Ben Sargent's cover illustration was perfect, but I think Henry Fairlie's article just scratches the surface. Looking back on this generation's history, why should we expect any less from them now than they've shown in the past? Perhaps the greediest geezer of them all, Malcolm Forbes, was on CBS recently, cheerleading for corporate America. He says it all for his peers. Get as much as you can and either hold on to it or spend it on toys with little regard for those less fortunate. A look at the money spent since the end of World War II and the fueling of the consumer economy at the expense of the rest of the world says where this generation is coming from. Throw in the worldwide massive pollution, the nuclear threat, and the budget deficit and what do we have—the geezer legacy.

DOUGLAS HUFNAGEL
Belfast, Maine

To the editors:
Just you wait, Henry Fairlie, just you wait. One doesn't change on becoming 65. You have the same desires, wants, even ambitions. I didn't retire until after 71; my husband, now 73, still works one week each month. We too were disturbed at the cost of living allowance (COLA) increase we received last January until we realized all it did was cover the increased cost of Medicare. We don't belong to AARP. We have no tax benefits in our state. We both still love good clothes, the theater, the opera. True, children laugh at my 1948 refrigerator, but I'd rather spend the money on good books, recordings, or magazines, even TNR, which I find I like less and less. Yes, we travel, through Elderhostel mostly, partly because when we were making mortgage payments and putting our children through college, we hadn't the time or money. We hope to stay right where we are, stairs and all, snow to shovel in winter, grass to tend in summer. We don't ride golf carts because we didn't before 65, but we're not going to settle back and just bake cookies and give out unwanted words of wisdom either. We have saved some money, and if we have a major illness, we hope it will cover it. If we're lucky, we'll leave it to our grandchildren. If you're so right, they'll need it.

PAULINE B. ALLEN
Omaha, Nebraska

To the editors:
Because cost of living allowances are based on a percentage of each recipient's present benefits, those who receive the highest benefits also receive the highest COLAs. This has a snowballing effect. A COLA of one flat sum to each recipient would help those who have low benefits and need the increase for survival, not fun.

DOROTHY BINN
Nutley, New Jersey

To the editors:
Henry Fairlie explains very well why for the first time in our history the elderly do not constitute the largest stratum among the poor. For the first time they are more or less organized and have political clout. That is why the elitist Reagan administration's persistent attempts to satisfy Fairlie's complaint have been largely blocked. And therein lies the moral for you under-65 youngsters wondering whether you'll ever see decent pensions. We retirees are your first (and perhaps only) line of defense. Your chance of enjoying a dignified retirement depends on our continued success in fighting off these attempts to deprive us of political power and thereby drive us back into poverty by the millions.

IRVING KALIN
Gainesville, Florida

To the editors:
Henry Fairlie states that "national health insurance is provided through Medicare." This is wrong. Medicare provides hospitalization care, paid for by a small portion of one's lifetime Social Security contributions. However, this care requires a $540 self-participation. Medicare covers the

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THE NEW REPUBLIC
MAY 16, 1988

GO TAKE A HIKE

Few of life's ironies are as easily understood as the fact that raising the minimum wage can hurt low-income workers. This is a lesson right out of Economics 101, readily driven home with supply and demand curves. You raise the cost of each worker, employers scale back their hiring accordingly, and the result (clearly delimited along the x-axis) is a loss of jobs—not to mention a small dose of inflation, as production costs rise.

The irony doesn't end there. It is usually liberal Democrats, friends of the downtrodden, who want to trigger this chain of events. And it is conservative Republicans who, faced with a boost in the minimum wage, are suddenly stricken with sensitivity to the plight of the unemployed.

This strange drama is unfolding once again. The minimum wage hasn't changed since Ronald Reagan took office (the longest stagnation in its history), and its purchasing power has dropped by nearly a third. Democrats are pushing for a steep hike. A House bill sponsored by Augustus Hawkins of California would raise it from $3.35 to $5.05 over four years. Edward Kennedy's companion bill would raise it to $4.65 over three years and thereafter peg it at half the average hourly wage. The Reagan administration has responded with its ritual veto threat and trotted out its most esteemed economists to warn of the jobs to be lost.

These warnings can't be dismissed casually. We too harbor doubts about some aspects of the legislation. But in the end we share the Democrats' perverse affection for a robust minimum wage. Its undoubted costs are outweighed by less distinct but ultimately tangible benefits.

Since 1938, when the minimum wage was created and set at 25 cents an hour, it has been adjusted periodically to keep pace with average wages. The adjustment has been sporadic, but almost never has the minimum wage dropped below 40 percent of the average manufacturing wage—until Reagan came to town. As of last year it stood at 34 percent of the average, a postwar low. Working full time, year round, at minimum wage will bring in $6,968—about three-fourths of the poverty level for a family of three. Clearly, from the minimum-wage earner's point of view, a change is in order.

Unless, of course, his or her job will be lost in the process. Congressional Budget Office projections show a four-year escalation to $5.05 costing between 250,000 and 500,000 jobs—around a third of a percent of total employment. (The majority staff of the House Education and Labor Committee found these numbers, which are more pessimistic than those from some studies, unpalatable; it ordered a revised version of the CBO report with the section "Effects on the Economy" deleted.) Estimates of the law's inflationary impact are less unsettling: around a half a point added to the consumer price index by the time the dust clears, a few years down the road.

In addition to hurting some of the workers who need help the most, the minimum wage helps some people who don't especially need it. Many minimum-wage earners are middle- and upper-class teenagers, and some are spouses of breadwinners. A 1986 Congressional Budget Office study found that only one in five minimum-wage earners was in a household below the poverty line. Granted, the poverty line—around $12,000 for a family of four—shouldn't serve as the upper limit on our generosity. But even if we push the line up to, say, $18,000, a minimum-wage hike mostly helps workers already above it; more than two-thirds of minimum-wage earners in the CBO study had household incomes at least 50 percent above the poverty line. In short, the minimum wage is an inefficient subsidy; as cash is rerouted from employers to poor workers, a lot of dollars fall into the pockets of workers who are nowhere near poor.

In making this point, conservatives are being a little too smart for their own good. By establishing that the typical minimum-wage earner doesn't live or die on his income, they've taken the punch out of their own minimum-wage horror stories. Putting 250,000 people out of work is never cause for cheer, but it's a lot less tragic if 150,000 of them don't desperately need the cash. It is fine to warn that people will lose jobs if the minimum wage rises, but it's disingenuous to act as if they're all inner-city teenagers.

The standard alternative to the minimum wage, the

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earned income tax credit, is not prone to leakage between subsidizer and subsidized. Such a credit is already built, modestly, into the tax code. In 1987 a married worker with a family and a household income of less than $15,000 was eligible for a tax credit of up to 14 percent of income. Representative Thomas Petri, a Wisconsin Republican, has proposed an expansion of the tax credit along with a slight increase in the minimum wage, up to $4 over several years.

If the administration had come up with some such plan, its principled arguments about the deficiencies of minimum wage as a subsidy would be harder to dismiss. We'd be happy to entertain a viable tax-credit proposal. But until Reagan gets serious about doing *something* for the working poor, he doesn't deserve anyone's sustained attention. (Actually, there is a plan he favors: establish a *sub*minimum wage for teenagers and a subminimum "training wage" for workers in their first, say, three months on the job. What an innovative way to encourage the firing of workers as they turn 20 or enter their fourth month of employment.)

In favoring a minimum wage over a tax credit, it isn't enough to complain that the latter entails government spending while the former doesn't. A minimum wage, after all, is a hidden tax on employers (and thus on consumers). Besides, to the extent that a wage hike does cost jobs, the welfare roll will grow, siphoning dollars from the treasury.

Still, the tax credit does suffer from two flaws, one small and technical and one large and philosophical. First, the working poor need a steady, respectable wage, not three bucks an hour plus a windfall every April. Sure, by filing the right tax form they can have the tax credit added to their paychecks. But almost none of them do so.

The larger problem with an income tax credit is that it's a handout. As this administration's social policy fades into the annals of social Darwinism, and liberals regroup, one of the pages they must take out of Reagan's book is

THE ZEITGEIST CHECKLIST

BY CHARLES PAUL FREUND

This Week		Last Week	Weeks on Chart
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1. BONFIRE OF INANITIES

Education '88. A wave of education blather is sweeping the country, from Bennett's report to campaign rhetoric to newsweekly covers to yet more textbook controversy. Americans think they can crawl out of this morass test point by test point, but that's an ironically materialistic conceit. Learning simply has no standing in the culture, and you cannot alter that by fiat.

2. DOWNED BY LAW

Drug war. The hot drug angle has become citizen vigilantism, especially by such groups as the Nation of Islam. The stories often treat this development with remarkable friendliness, downplaying the serious breakdown in civic order it represents. Meanwhile, Baltimore's mayor is the first major politician to call for decriminalization. A-ha!

3. TICKET TO HIDE

Democrats. The Democratic story has moved on to the veep question. The answer, right now, is Sam Nunn, who plugs many Dukakis holes. There's even weird talk of making Nunn v.p. *and* Secretary of Something to attract him. The scenario is ridiculous, but the talk cuts two ways: Nunn has many perceived strengths, and Dukakis doesn't.

4. THIN MAN

Bush. Bush is gradually rematerializing as a man with a serious problem: he doesn't mean much to anybody. The polls have been pretty unreliable this year, but they still make Bush look awfully weak. His stabs at a theme have evoked no interest, and GOP buddies are urging him to come up with a "message." Republican complacency is starting to look unjustified.

5. BOAST NO BILLS

Trade bill. Trade bill coverage focused on the plant closing measure—a sign of the president's power to shape public discourse; he threatened a veto. But what about the rest of the bill? How much is pork, how much Yellow Peril xenophobia? How much undercuts an apparently growing export sector? Never mind. White House vs. Congress arm wrestling is a lot easier.

6. STONES UNTURNED

Israel. The emotional edge of the Israel-Palestinian story appears to be dulling. New angles are harder to find, the story is impossibly complex yet repetitive, and Israel's image has altered here, changing the perceived nature of the conflict. The numbers game of dead stone-throwing rioters, you note, is over. Even the Abu Jihad killing had little impact.

7. RACE TO JUDGMENT

The Rehnquist Court. Is there a Reagan judicial legacy after all? Is this the legacy he wants? The Court's desire to re-examine the *Runyon* decision is bizarre. The culture's been (unjustifiably) proud of its redress of racial wrongs. Incentives to equal treatment, such as the right to sue when discriminated against, have hardly been controversial. This is a curious agenda.

8. SMOKE RINGED

Smoking. A study reports that smoking is now perceived as *aberrant* behavior. Even so, rationality may be creeping up on this hysteria. The "passive smoking" issue is far from settled; some respectable voices regard it as having become ideological. Indeed, anti-smoking's class angle is popping up more often; "Thank you for not smoking" is upper-middle-class talk.

9. BOTTOM LINEUP

Baltimore Orioles. At press time, the O's had dropped 19 straight and were being pushed into the pantheon of Lovable Losers. But despite such gimmickry as marathon deejays, this isn't playing as Mets-style fun so much as sports horror. The Birds were once mighty; this free-fall is a bit steep. Maybe this story is first cousin to the Connally bankruptcy, a parable of decline.

10. TAKING LEAF

Gypsy moths. Bring back the cicadas! You couldn't hear yourself think, but at least they didn't eat anything. This year's spring plague, gypsy moths, want to eat the East's oaks and willows. There's actually social confusion over the appropriate response. People aren't too happy about the heavyweight spraying, but mostly they're shutting up rather than lose the beloved trees.

*Item resurfaces in the Zeitgeist after at least one week's absence.

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the idea that government checks for poor people are stigmatizing and stultifying. It is better, whenever possible, to deliver the social goods through the course of normal, everyday life—to involve people in the game of capitalism rather than exempting them and handing out consolation prizes. Workfare is one way to do this, and the minimum wage is another.

How is it, conservatives may ask, that a minimum wage, in raising unemployment, will involve more people in the game of capitalism? It's a good question, with a good answer: we want to bring people into the game for the duration.

The largest single domestic policy challenge today is to integrate the underclass into the economy, to instill a work ethic in people culturally averse to labor. An inner-city father of two who tests the waters of capitalism is unlikely to seek total immersion if his first job brings less than $7,000 a year. But $10,000 might be a bit more tempting.

The question is not whether we want more jobs or fewer jobs. The question is whether we want to have lots of marginal, high-turnover jobs, or jobs that, though fewer in number, offer stability and dignity. Will the margins of our economy be a place where the masses are constantly recycled, where each day thousands of disillusioned workers are traded in for the next victims? Or will the bottom end of the wage scale be a steppingstone to self-reliance? The only way to get lots of people playing the game of capitalism is to make it a game worth playing.

Though the Kennedy and Hawkins legislation sounds extreme—"a 51 percent increase in 37 months" is how the U.S. Chamber of Commerce bills the House version—it is in line with historical benchmarks. In 1991 a wage of $5.05 will be somewhere around 45 percent of the average manufacturing wage, right in the neighborhood where it hovered from Eisenhower through Carter. Actually, it was a bit below 45 percent during the stagflation of the Carter era, and a bit above it during the booming '50s. And appropriately so; in good times, when companies have some extra cash, a high minimum wage doesn't cost much in jobs. In hard times, it should be raised only gingerly.

This suggests that Kennedy's proposal to link the minimum wage to average wages is misguided. The minimum wage can be raised prudently from time to time without much dislocation. Now is such a time. But if we make escalation automatic, the worst horror stories of conservative economists may someday come true.

NOTEBOOK

☐ CRIME WATCH: Kent Hance, a member of the Texas Railroad Commission, the anachronistically named agency that supervises that state's oil industry, attended the recent meeting in Vienna at which OPEC tried to induce other oil producers to join its price-setting conspiracy. It has long been our contention that Texas was, in effect, an auxiliary member of OPEC, and Texans have made no bones about their wish to see higher oil prices. But for a state official to express solidarity with this gigantic conspiracy in restraint of trade is genuinely scandalous. Commissioner Hance should be arrested at the airport if he tries to re-enter the country, along with his co-conspirators.

☐ FIRST THE GOOD NEWS:

Producer Prices Up 0.6 Percent

Production Report Suggests No Inflation Surge Likely

—*Washington Post*, April 16

PRODUCER PRICES UP 0.6%, STIRRING INFLATION WORRIES

—*New York Times*, same day

(thanks to Roger A. Brooks, Bethesda, Maryland)

☐ PARLEZ-VOUS FRANÇAIS, MESSIEURS?:

HIJACKERS' THREAT:
'A SLOW, QUIET, MASSACRE'

—*Montreal Daily News*, April 11

Arab hijackers pull back from massacre threat

—*Montreal Gazette*, same day

☐ KEEP OFF THE DITCHWEED, FELLAS:

> It seems appareft that Federad funds fgr Natiofal Guard fgrces used for cannabis eradication are beifg spent on ditchweed. But as the Pglicy Bgard's Cannabis Repgrt made clear, Federal funds should not be wasted on issues of such a low priority as ditchweed.[126]

—"Going to Pot: Marijuana Cultivation on Public Lands and the Federal Response," Report of the Committee on Government Operations, U.S. House of Representatives

(thanks to David L. Dennie, Washington, D.C.)

☐ HYMIETOWN REDUX: Four years ago Jesse Jackson's offensive Hymietown reference went almost unnoticed in a long *Washington Post* feature until an alert editorial writer said, in effect, "Look, here's something important and disgusting." Jackson has been more careful this year in his remarks about Jews, but he did let slip an amazing statement about Israel that, once again, was buried and, once again, everyone seems to be overlooking. Discussing the reasons for black-Jewish tensions in an interview with editors of the *New York Times*, published on April 16, Jackson remarked in part:

> But I'm saying that you also have a fundamental issue of tension like—I guess it was two months ago—when South Africa invaded Angola and it was really a South Africa and Israeli joint project.

There is no evidence whatsoever that Israel aided any South African invasion of Angola, let alone participated as a partner in a "joint project." Will he get away with this one?

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The case against folksingers.

IF *I* HAD A HAMMER

IN OCTOBER 1970 senior officials of the Nixon administration met secretly with representatives of the anti-war movement in a Carson City, Nevada, motel. There, a broad agreement was reached: in exchange for the government's bringing the war in Vietnam to a close, the movement would see to it that all American folksingers went away. The government even agreed to provide job retraining and new identities under the Federal Witness Protection Program. Everyone thought this was fair.

For the next 15 years or so, folksingers basically kept their promise. Some went to Greece; others got master's degrees in Ute linguistics before going to work for Kidder Peabody; many more became coopers and tinsmiths; one took tango lessons. But due to a catastrophic oversight on the part of the government, *they never surrendered their guitars*. So all through the 1970s and '80s there was always the possibility that one day folksingers would emerge from their smithies, dust off those old Martin 12-strings, and re-lay down their weary tunes.

Now it has happened.

Yes, all across the nation, folksingers are making unobstructed comebacks. Some, like James Taylor, have less hair; some, like Tom Paxton, have no hair; some, like Mary Travers, are still the flaxen-haired cornballs they always were. Some, like Richie Havens, sing the songs that made them—er—famous, while others, including the sinister Joni Mitchell, work in an entirely new idiom, effecting a fusion of pop, folk, rock, and jazz that cannot go unpunished indefinitely.

Like many of my countrymen, I have always feared comebacks by anything or anybody. That's because when I was a child, my parents used to issue dire warnings about what would happen if I wasn't good. "If you don't behave," my father would warn, "the big bands will come back." The big bands never did come back, largely because I *did* behave. But the next generation failed to teach their motherless children well about the troubles they had seen and the hard rain that might fall again if no one passed a law against folksingers coming round.

So now they have come around. According to Ed Bradley on "60 Minutes" a few weeks ago, 3,000 people a night are showing up to see Joan Baez. Presumably some of them pay to get in. A recent article about Peter, Paul & Mary by Robert K. Oermann of the Gannett News Service warned: "The reunion concerts and two reunion LPs have been wildly received by the public, from grandparents to preschoolers, all under the spell of their music." What's more, Oermann cautioned: "A new LP of Christmas and Hanukkah songs is in the works. Yarrow is remastering the historic first five LPs for digital reissue. The threesome is working on a book for Scribners." These monsters will stop at nothing.

In many ways the most lethal threat is posed not by professional folksingers (an oxymoron, as is the average folksinger) but by all those remorseless amateurs who terrorize tourists and commuters alike in subway stations the world over. Step into a subway from Paris to Madrid to London to Philly and see if you will not be greeted by the strains of "Blowin' in the Wind" or "Harvest." Try metroing from Sacre Coeur to Montparnasse without hearing "Southern Man" or "Don't Think Twice, Babe, It's All Right." Just try making it from the Metropolitan Museum to Lincoln Center without hearing a few bars of "Me and Bobby McGee" or "City of New Orleans." Just try.

Unsuspecting municipalities the world over are floating subway bond issues at this very moment, oblivious to the nightmare that awaits them. Folksingers all have subscriptions to magazines like *Metropolitan Transport Monthly* and *Subway Construction News*, so they know years in advance when new subway lines will open. Long before the subways in Washington and Pittsburgh started operations, folksingers were spotted prowling around the construction sites, rehearsing their baleful tunes. Yes, a truly alert citizenry could have headed them off at the underpass, but alas, they didn't. And now they must pay the price: "Mr. Bojangles." "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" "Puff, the Magic Dragon."

Some people may say I am making too much of this. If you're one of them, repeat the following words and see if they do not send shivers down your spine. Hootenanny. True love's hair. Kumbaya. Morning dew. Thirsty boots. Hammer in the evening. Banjo. Old Stewball. There is a season. Guantanamera.

Let me recount a personal experience that alerted me to the impending horror. One recent Friday morning I spied a tiny box in the *New York Times* announcing that a folksinger would be giving a benefit concert on Sunday at a Times Square Church. Reading this, I immediately asked myself, "If I were a homeless person, would this news cheer me up?" No, I decided, it would not. But for fairness' sake, I tried to get some of my friends to go to the concert. They refused. They all said they had other things to do, even when I offered to pay their admission and write about them favorably in a national publication.

"We have to lay down the drum track on my demos," said my friend Marilyn, herself a folksinger who writes harrowing songs about lost innocence and dark corners of the human soul, but who also has many fine qualities.

"Would you go if you didn't have to do the demos?"

"No," she said.

Why didn't I go myself? At first I rationalized that I couldn't be objective about folksingers, because I used to dream of forming death squads to go into the subways and abduct anyone singing "Heart of Gold" or "This Land Is Your Land." But the truth was: I didn't want to go for the same reason no one else wanted to go. I didn't want to go because like everyone else in the Greater New York metropolitan area—including the homeless—*I had better things to do on a Sunday night.*

Chores, for example.

On Monday I called the folksinger's apartment and got his roommate. She told me that 50 or 60 people had at-

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tended. I asked who her roommate's influences were.

"The Chad Mitchell Trio," she said. "Crosby, Stills & Nash. James Taylor. And he loves the Cowsills."

"Really?"

"Really."

That night I called the folksinger himself. He confirmed that just 50 paying customers had turned up, meaning he'd raised a whopping $250 for the homeless—minus expenses. I asked who his influences were.

"Lyrically, Bruce Cockburn and Holly Near," he said. "Musically, James Taylor and Dan Fogelberg."

I shivered. I started to think: if this guy has to make a living being a folksinger, and 50 or 60 people keep showing up at his concerts, and he gives all the money away, he's going to end up out on the street. And once he's out on the street, it's just one step down to the subway. And if he ends up in the subway, all of Gotham's going to see him down there singing "Southern Man" and "Blowin' in the Wind." I don't want to think about that. I don't want to think anymore about this endless cycle of homeless people, folksingers, homeless folksingers, folksingers doing benefits for homeless folksingers. Instead, I want all caring people to join with me and roll up our sleeves, open our wallets, and tackle this senseless human tragedy. Let's solve the folksinger crisis before things start to get really ugly.

JOE QUEENAN

Joe Queenan is a New York-based misanthrope.

The mayor explains himself.

"CRAZY" EDDIE?

ON APRIL 1, during an impromptu press interview, I made some comments pertaining to Jesse Jackson. I said, "He thinks maybe Jews and other supporters of Israel should vote for him—they have got to be crazy! In the same way they'd be crazy if they were black and voted for someone who was praising Botha and the racist supporters of the South African administration. . . . He [Jackson] has two standards, and they're not my standards."

Some people have praised me for speaking out. Many others have condemned me. In rereading those comments, I would not withdraw a single word.

Early one Friday morning, a week after I made the remarks, I noticed an old friend, who is very active in the Jewish community, sitting near the police desk at City Hall, waiting to meet with my deputy mayor. After we exchanged greetings, she said, "You know, Ed, I am offended by your speaking for the Jews . . . that Jews would be crazy to vote for Jesse Jackson. And because of what you said, my husband and I are thinking of coming out for Jackson."

I replied, "Let's review what I said. My statement referred not only to Jews but to the supporters of Israel. Do you oppose every part of my statement?"

She said, "No, only to the use of the word 'Jew.' "

I said, "If I had said that the supporters of Israel would be crazy to vote for Jackson, would that have been OK?"

She said, "Yes."

I said, "Are you opposed to my having said blacks and supporters of black causes would be crazy to vote for George Bush?"

She said, "No, that is OK."

I said, "So the word 'black' does not distress you in that context, but the word 'Jew' does upset you."

She said, "Yes."

I invited her into my office, where we continued the discussion. I said, "I want to tell you something I have never voiced before, but which I think is true. Cast your mind back to when you and I were young. Remember how overwhelmed we were with the Hitler rhetoric which made 'Jew' a pejorative word? It became so pejorative that we found another way to describe ourselves. And that word was 'Jewish.' Isn't it a fact that if anyone ever pointed to an individual in your presence and said, 'He is a Jew,' you would feel as though someone had placed a dagger in your heart?"

She said, "Yes."

I said, "But if they had said that he was 'Jewish,' would that be OK?"

She said, "Yes."

I said, "The word 'Jew' is still pejorative for many, and has been for many years. But it's not for me. I am proud to be identified as a Jew."

Another reaction to my criticism of Jackson came from Representative Charles Rangel. He is the leading black public official in the state of New York, and has tremendous clout in Washington because of his seniority on the Ways and Means Committee.

He said of me: "How dare this man declare himself king of the Jews?"

My immediate response was that his statement was an outrageous insult to Jews, Catholics, and other Christians. His comment was a reference to the title posted derisively above Christ's head on the cross by the Romans. And yet there was not a single condemnation of Rangel by anyone other than me. Is it unfair to ask why?

Rangel's criticism was stated in less offensive terms by others. Ken Auletta wrote in the *Daily News*, "What is wrong is the inflammatory way Koch framed the issue. And the unspoken assumption that Jews should think and act as one, or that Jews should think only as Jews, not also as Americans. That puts Jews right back into the stereotypical ghetto in which our politics is sometimes mired."

In New York City we have 175 different religious, racial, and ethnic groups. Is it wrong for these groups to have a special interest in matters of great concern to them? Blacks are concerned with South Africa. Hispanics are against any law or constitutional amendment that would make English the official language of the United States. Many people of Irish extraction have concerns about the virtual civil war in

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Northern Ireland. Isn't it OK for Irish people to demand boycotts of Great Britain, and demand that we send a special U.S. envoy to Ireland? Why should any of these groups be denied the opportunity to question candidates on any of these issues?

More Jews live in New York City than in any one city in the entire world. Would they allow Mike Dukakis or Al Gore to reject invitations to respond to issues in which Jews have a special interest? (Would the NAACP allow them to duck questions pertaining to special interests of the black community?) Yet Jesse Jackson turned down numerous requests to address Jewish groups. Is it unfair to ask why?

The media and the candidates have treated Jackson in a patronizing way. They have not asked him any of the tough questions. They have allowed him to obfuscate and decline to answer. I understand how much the Jackson candidacy means to black Americans, and I recognize that my pointed criticism has distressed many. But I believe Jackson is a serious candidate and must be treated seriously.

EDWARD I. KOCH

Edward I. Koch is the mayor of New York City.

CAMPAIGN '88

GEO. STRATEGY

IF AMERICA ever needed a shrewd foreign policy strategist as president, it needs one next. The new president will have to avoid being outmaneuvered by Mikhail Gorbachev and move the Soviets toward agreements that are in our interest. He has to get the Arabs to make peace with Israel, and vice versa, with time running perilously short. He must save a dozen fragile democracies in the Western Hemisphere from a formidable consortium of enemies—Communists, drug traffickers, and terrorists, plus endemic poverty and injustice.

Besides that, he's got to keep Iran and the Soviet Union from dominating the Persian Gulf. He has to get Japan to foot more of the world's development bill. He has to get Congress to support him and stop trying to run the world itself. And he's got to do everything with less money, and relatively less power, than American presidents have had in the past. As former national security adviser Brent Scowcroft puts it, "We've got to be a lot smarter to do the same things we used to do without being smart. We can't get what we want anymore just by throwing our weight around."

Of the two certain nominees in 1988, George Bush clearly is better prepared for these tasks—in fact, he's one of the best prepared would-be presidents in history. He's been ambassador to China and the United Nations and director of the CIA. As vice president he has taken 40 foreign trips, has talked with all the world's top leaders, and has watched at close range as a reasonably successful bargain-from-strength global policy unfolded.

He has played a part in some successes. Early in the administration he helped tilt China policy toward Beijing rather than toward Taipei, where some right-wing Reaganauts wanted it. In 1983 he read the riot act to the oligarchy in El Salvador, substantially halting death squad activity. He helped get Europe to agree to INF deployment, making it possible to bargain Soviet SS-20s to zero. And last year he met with Poland's Gen. Wojciech Jaruzelski, reportedly getting the regime to grant more political space for the Solidarity movement.

Bush also has had the benefit of watching some colossal blunders being made, including the Lebanon operation of 1983-84, the Reykjavik summit, and Iranamok. Bush admits he blessed the Iran arms sales and supported the *contras*, but denies knowing anything about the diversions of money from one operation to the other. Besides having a ringside seat as vice president, he has had time to think about the tasks ahead and about the people he might assemble to tackle them.

On paper, his 1988 campaign positions are intelligent and moderate-conservative. He is cautious about Gorbachev's intentions, yet "waiting for him . . . ready to move from an era of confrontation to an era of cooperation." He wants to "stabilize funding" for defense, improve procurement, and cut waste. He's for SDI research, but not early deployment. He has put arms control high on his foreign policy agenda and has said favorable things about START-style deep cuts in nuclear weaponry. He wants to keep U.S. troops in Europe for now, yet bargain with the Soviets to reduce conventional forces to equal levels. He believes in the Monroe Doctrine, favors continued isolation of Cuba, but looks to economic measures to foster democracy in the hemisphere, rather than merely military ones.

He supports the Shultz initiative in the Mideast, but says he rules out (as Michael Dukakis does not) an independent Palestinian state. He wants to make nuclear nonproliferation a major project in the next administration, starting with a pact between India and Pakistan. He says Japan has had a "free ride" on defense and wants it to spend more to protect itself and help the Philippines and other debt-ridden developing countries. In general, says another former national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Bush is a balanced international centrist, not a flaming crusader or a détentist." Brzezinski says he is not endorsing Bush, but thinks he would make "a good foreign policy president."

Several of Bush's administration colleagues and Republican boosters aren't so sure. Some of them express fears that he's not tough enough to handle Gorbachev and Yitzhak Shamir. Others say that his admirable personal virtues—niceness, loyalty, and decency—lead him to hire and retain weak subordinates and to go along with whatever advice he's given, exercising too little personal judgment. They doubt whether he's used his time as vice president to construct a real strategy for the future that

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he could sell to Congress and the country.

As one former subordinate put it, "Bush listens well, takes advice well, and implements it well. He is unfailingly generous to staff. But his leadership—it's not that strong. He tends to go along with the trends. That's what happened with Iran-*contra*. He got swept up in the counter-terror fad. He was in the meetings where Shultz and Weinberger objected and in meetings with the president where the issue of the hostages came up every day. He chose to side with those who were hot, who said, 'Let's go do it.' "

THIS IS A common refrain among Bush associates. When arms control got hot, Bush was all for it. He still seems not to understand, even in private, arguments advanced by Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, and others that U.S. security could be damaged by the START agreement, which would increase the number of Soviet warheads aimed at each U.S. missile. Bush says he is "waiting for Gorbachev" to demonstrate whether he is truly a reformer, but seems not to have a strategy for pushing him toward actions the United States wishes him to take. Nixon, for one, thinks the United States should drop nuclear arms control as the top aim of talks with the Soviets and get them to reduce conventional weapons in Europe, cut aid to Nicaragua, and stop making mischief in the Mideast and the Gulf as the price of better economic and political relations.

Nixon told the *Wall Street Journal* in early February that dealing with Gorbachev and the economy required a president who is "mean and tough," like John Connally or Bob Dole, and that he didn't see in Bush the necessary "independence" or "drive." He said he feared that Bush would "rely too much on bureaucrats at the departments of State and Defense."

In recent weeks, now that Bush has clinched the Republican nomination, Nixon has become more charitable. He told me, in an interview on the PBS show "American Interests," that the campaign had toughened Bush. But clearly he still worries that Bush "has always been an establishment man" who would decide what he thinks by asking, " 'Well, what does the State Department have to say? And the Defense Department, and the NSC. Then, we'll pick from the options.' " Nixon said, "The leadership has to come from him, but I think he's very capable of it."

Nixon thinks that the next president's foremost policy appointment should be his national security adviser, and that foreign policy ought to be run out of the White House, so bureaucrats could only implement and not make it. Bush aides say—as aides to candidates almost always do—that he will be his own secretary of state. Yet it's almost universally accepted that Bush's secretary of state (if he wants the job) will be Bush's friend of 30 years, Treasury Secretary James Baker, who has emerged as the dominant force in every area of policy he has been associated with during the Reagan administration.

The leading candidate for defense secretary seems to be former Navy Secretary John Lehman, the brash young father of the 600-ship Navy who has been a traveling campaign adviser to Bush and is expected to handle defense matters in Republican platform deliberations. Bush aides say that others being consulted on foreign policy include Scowcroft, Brzezinski, and U.S. Ambassador to West Germany Richard Burt, any one of whom might be an able national security adviser. Others expected to populate a Bush administration include William Hyland and Helmut Sonnenfeldt, veterans of the Ford-Kissinger era, plus a sprinkling of conservatives and Democrats to provide political protection and entrée with Congress. At State, Baker could be expected to want to bring in Richard Darman, his creative deputy at the White House and Treasury, if Darman does not become head of the Office of Management and Budget.

IF BAKER were secretary of state, what kind of policy would result? Baker is a skilled negotiator and politician, and is willing to initiate significant policy departures—as he did in devaluing the dollar, promoting economic coordination among the industrialized countries, and increasing U.S. backing for the World Bank and IMF, all moves that were considered heresy by Reaganite purists.

An ex-Marine and a Texan, Baker favored the Grenada invasion and supported aid to the *contras*, aides say, "but not passionately or ideologically." Conservatives accuse Baker, among others, of failing to mount an aggressive White House campaign to build public support for the *contras* and of allowing the Boland aid cutoff to be pushed through Congress during the 1984 presidential race. Baker supported introduction of U.S. troops into Lebanon in 1983, but fought hard in early 1984 to get them out, believing they would be an increasing liability during Reagan's re-election race.

Baker is said to be acutely conscious of the need for stability and economic growth in Mexico and the rest of Latin America, but reportedly he opposes activist meddling in other nations on behalf of human rights, as the United States is doing in Panama. He is said to believe that economic sanctions aimed at toppling Manuel Noriega are "ruining the Panamanians most likely to support us, the middle class." Other Bush aides also think that "social engineering"—trying to impose democracy—in Third World countries such as Nicaragua, Iran, and the Philippines constitutes "enormous arrogance." "We got by in the Philippines on pure, blind luck," a Bush supporter said.

A Bush-Baker administration is exceedingly worrisome to some supporters of Israel who see a pro-Arab tilt in both Texans. "These guys aren't pro-Palestinian," said one Jewish political operative. "Democrats will tend to be pro-Palestinian because they're the latest fashionable victim. Bush and Baker will be pro-Saudi." As is widely known, Bush encouraged Saudi Arabia to "stabilize"—that is, raise—oil prices in 1986, when the world was benefiting from a price plunge. Supporters of Israel in the administration also accuse him of siding with Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger in the campaign to condemn Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982. And pro-Israeli lobbyists fear that Bush would defer on Mideast policy to "the permanent government"—the Near East bureau of the State Depart-

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ment and professionals in the CIA and Pentagon—which tends to be pro-Arab. Close friends of Baker think that he, even more than Bush, will "lean on Israel to save Israel." One aide said that Baker would even look for ways to get Israel to negotiate with the PLO. Bush has a close relationship with King Hussein and still favors a leading role for Jordan in peace talks and a final settlement.

Baker has detractors among two other groups—those who fear he has insufficient background in foreign affairs, and those who think he is insufficiently ideological. One of the former said that "Baker is just like Shultz. He has no basic grounding in history or international politics. He knows nothing about the societies and cultures he'll be dealing with. Baker is a smart guy and a good tactician, but if he weren't George Bush's pal, no one would be talking about him as secretary of state."

Meanwhile, some look at the 1984 Reagan campaign—managed by Baker—and see failure to seek a mandate to accomplish anything, and they fear that the 1988 Bush campaign will be much the same. "Bush, Baker, and Shultz—these are good managers without any overriding sense of purpose," said a former Reagan official now ensconced at Jeane Kirkpatrick's foreign policy wing of the American Enterprise Institute. "They are anti-ideologists. They have no belief in the power of ideas. If you can't articulate what you are using American power for, you can't build public support. Then when you need the public behind you in rough times, you don't have it."

Not one of these critics, of course, prefers Michael Dukakis over George Bush. Nixon says that in "defense policy and in dealing with the Russians, Dukakis would be a disaster." He adds, "I don't question at all that Dukakis isn't smart. He is. He's cool. He's a tough guy." But Dukakis wants to give up SDI, the MX, Midgetman, nuclear carriers, and flight testing of missiles. What about Bush? "George Bush knows the issues. He will be able to sit opposite Gorbachev and not only say, as Dukakis says, 'I'm a tough guy,' but he has something to be tough with." In other words, there's no ideal choice this year. Neither candidate is really up to the challenges we face. We'll have to take the better guy and hope that America stays lucky.

MORTON M. KONDRACKE

CAMPAIGN '88

BUSHONOMICS

BY MY COUNT George Bush has eaten lunch with President Reagan about 300 times. They're supposed to get together one-on-one every Thursday in the study adjacent to the Oval Office for a meal, usually tacos and enchiladas. But they miss when one is out of town. (They'll miss two lunches because of Reagan's trip to the Moscow summit May 25 to June 3.) I figure the rate is about 40 lunches a year, for nearly seven-and-a-half years. Thus, 300 lunches, each better than an hour long. "That's a lot more than an Oxford tutorial for a Ph.D.," notes a Bush adviser.

Believe it or not, Reagan is something of a teacher. He likes to spin out theories about life, including economic life, and Bush is bound to have heard them all, probably more than once. This has affected Bush's economics. His aides like to say that his views on the economy haven't changed "significantly" in the White House. But the evidence is that they have. For one thing, Bush has adopted Reagan's skepticism about raising taxes. "He's more firm as a result of the last seven-and-a-half years that finding a way to bring new revenues into the system only yields greater spending," says Craig Fuller, Bush's chief of staff. In Chicago in March, for instance, Bush declared, "If we raise taxes to close the deficit, Congress . . . will spend more money."

Bush doesn't call himself a supply-sider (Reagan does), but he's headed in that direction. Months before Reagan began advocating a drop in the top tax rate on long-term capital gains from 28 percent to 15 percent, Bush had privately embraced the idea. Economists who discussed it with him—they included Lawrence Lindsey of Harvard, Richard Rahn of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and William Niskanen of the Cato Institute—found him extraordinarily receptive. He readily accepted the argument that a capital gains differential would raise, not lose, revenue. Bush was so taken with the proposal that he intended to include it in his announcement speech last October. But it fell through the cracks and wasn't unveiled until the next week. Bush said the tax cut would "encourage risk-taking and entrepreneurship by providing an incentive for investment," language similar to Jack Kemp's. Four months later the proposal appeared in the legislative package Reagan sent to Congress.

Two other Bush proposals have a Reaganesque, supply-side quality. One is the "tax pledge," a public promise not to increase taxes. Bush joined Kemp and Pete du Pont in taking the pledge early on in the campaign. (Bob Dole, Pat Robertson, and Al Haig declined.) He "pledged to oppose efforts to increase marginal tax rates from the 15 to 28 percent rates for individuals and 34 percent rate for businesses." Bush said he would also "oppose any reduction or elimination of deductions and credits unless matched dollar for dollar by subsequent reductions in tax rates." In several nationally televised debates, Bush was even more specific. "As president, I will not raise your taxes, period," he said.

The other is Bush's "flexible budget freeze," the striking feature of which is the absence of any tax increase. The vice president has yet to spell out the full details of his budget, and chances are he won't in the campaign. His aides assume that Michael Dukakis, as the Democratic presidential nominee, won't be very specific either. Anyway, the principle of the Bush plan is that overall federal

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spending, aside from Social Security and debt payment, should not rise faster than the rate of inflation. If some programs get more spending, then others would get less. Bush wants more money for education, fighting drugs, AIDS research, environmental protection, etc. He'd cut spending for highways, and also save through "procurement reform" at the Pentagon and closing military bases. The result: a balanced budget in 1993.

Good luck. Bush would have to be breathtakingly lucky for this to work. The administration's economic assumptions—no recession, steady growth of 3.2 percent for five years, inflation dipping to 2.5 percent—would have to come true. They usually don't. Pentagon spending, which Reagan desperately wants to boost, would have to stay flat. And the spending pattern of the Reagan years would have to be reversed. The gross national product rose 64.2 percent from 1980 to 1987 ($2.7 billion to $4.5 billion), while federal spending grew 70 percent ($591 billion to $1 trillion). Looked at another way, tax revenues remained at 19.4 percent of GNP, but spending jumped from 22.1 percent to 22.8 percent. Bush says he'd convene a "deficit summit" to work out fresh spending cuts with Congress. But would Congress supinely offer Bush spending cuts that it wouldn't give Reagan? I doubt it. Besides, Bush has already ruled out the most obvious quid pro quo in any deal with congressional Democrats, a tax hike.

Supply-sider Jude Wanniski, among others, has raised the question of whether Bush's economic positions are merely tactical. Hawkish talk about holding the line against tax increases thrills most Republican audiences, after all. Dole discovered this to his regret. And Bush knew he had to thwart Kemp. In fact, Bush strategists thought Kemp, not Dole, would be Bush's chief rival for the nomination. So it would only be smart politics for Bush to take away Kemp's best issue, taxes. That's exactly what he did. Bush also took at least one risk. In the South, and particularly in South Carolina, Dole and Robertson pushed protectionism, putatively the popular position. Dole even endorsed legislation aiding the textile industry. In the Atlanta debate before Super Tuesday, Bush stood fervently for free trade. Reagan withstood pressure for trade curbs, said Bush. "And I learned from that, if you keep on course, that the best answer is open markets. . . . One reason I oppose textile legislation and support the textile industry—and those are not incompatible—is that I don't want to see retaliation." "Perhaps George Bush has become a believer," concludes Wanniski.

IF NOTHING ELSE, Bush saw firsthand at the White House that predictions of imminent doom for Reaganomics proved wrong. The chief doomsayer was Martin Feldstein, the chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers from 1982 to 1984. Feldstein "was confidently predicting doom from the time of his arrival," says an administration official. "Every quarter he was there, he predicted very low growth or a growth recession. There was never a period he predicted anything like 60 months of growth." (The Reagan recovery is now in its 65th month.) Bush adviser James Baker, then the White House chief of staff, now treasury secretary, feuded with Feldstein, a traditional economic conservative who wanted to raise taxes to narrow the deficit. Bush saw that "empirical reality went against Feldstein's predictions," says the official. "When Feldstein opens his mouth and says 'the wolf is coming' or 'the wolf is here,' he can't be believed as much as the first time he says 'wolf.' "

Feldstein, now at Harvard, is still a Bush adviser. Feldstein has been friends with Bush for years, and in the late 1970s gave seminars for Bush and his allies in Kennebunkport, Maine. Both Peter Kilborn of the *New York Times* and Hobart Rowan of the *Washington Post* cite the Feldstein connection as evidence that Bush is adopting, as Kilborn put it, "a more moderate, pragmatic agenda." But Feldstein's influence has waned, and the tax pledge and cut in the capital gains rate are hardly moderate. The budget freeze is the brainstorm of Michael Boskin of Stanford, a conservative economist who deals closely with both Bush and his staff. Feldstein, who thinks the dollar should sink more, may have persuaded Bush to opt for floating exchange rates. "I don't think the government ought to try to set the value of the dollar vis-à-vis other currencies at all," Bush said in the NBC debate last December. But aides suggest Bush is moving toward support for the Jim Baker position, namely that the dollar should be stabilized. These days Bush sees Feldstein "periodically but not regularly," says Fuller.

IN THEIR futile effort to show that Bush's views haven't changed much, his aides rewrite the history of Bush's famous charge in 1980 that Reagan was proposing "voodoo economics." The charge was made in Pittsburgh in April 1980, and Bush's aides now explain that Reagan was talking tax cuts but not spending cuts at the time. That explanation doesn't wash. Reagan had spent his entire political career yakking about reducing the size of government and slashing government programs. In truth, Bush was criticizing the kind of fiscal program that he's come to favor.

A further sign that Bush has shifted is the full-throated backing he's getting from supply-siders who preferred Reagan in 1980. Rahn of the Chamber of Commerce, whose wife, Peggy Noonan, is a Bush speechwriter, says those who fear Bush will "sell out" the Reaganite, supply-side position "are dead wrong. Jack Kemp thinks they're wrong." Arthur Laffer, a founder of supply-side economics, goes further. He draws an analogy with Apple Computers. Reagan, he says, was like Steve Wozniak, the visionary who started Apple. Bush is like John Scully, the current Apple president who has put the company on stable and prosperous footing. "Bush is the Scully of supply-economics," says Laffer. We shall see.

FRED BARNES

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Dukakis's slow, sure bid for the White House.

THE TORTOISE

BY HENDRIK HERTZBERG

PITY GEORGE BUSH. His people have been saying for a long time that they would like nothing better than to run against Michael Dukakis (except maybe to run against Jesse Jackson). Well, it looks like they're going to get their wish, and they may yet regret it.

It's understandable that the Republicans have tended to look upon Dukakis as easy pickings, almost as their dream opponent. How much trouble can they really expect from a short, uninspiring Northeastern liberal with a funny name, no previous experience in national politics and none at all in foreign policy, and a political career that has been played out entirely within the confines of a state that was the only one carried by George McGovern in 1972 and has since been known principally as the home of those favorite bogeymen of Republican fund-raising letters, Tip O'Neill and Edward Kennedy?

The answer is that Dukakis will be a much more formidable opponent than the Bush people could have imagined as recently as a month ago. They had to have been impressed, as were Dukakis's detractors in his own party, by the assurance with which the governor of Massachusetts walked cool and unscorched through the hellfire of the New York primary campaign. Dukakis went into that primary as a rather shaky front-runner, still haunted by his Michigan loss and dogged by doubts about how well he could compete in a state where passions are large and volatile, voters cynical and unpredictable, and politicians sharklike and imperious. He emerged the nominee in all but name, having obliterated Albert Gore, tamed (for the moment) Jesse Jackson, and increased his own stature at least as much as the two non-candidate Democratic players in the New York game, Mayor Edward Koch and Governor Mario Cuomo, diminished theirs. As many have noted, Koch helped Dukakis by drawing off the state's racial poisons to himself, thus damaging both the candidate he endorsed (Gore, who was embarrassed and humiliated by Koch's attentions even as he welcomed them) and the candidate he attacked (Jackson, whose populist message was drowned out by the Koch-abetted cacophony about blacks vs. Jews). Cuomo could have helped Dukakis by endorsing him. But he helped him almost as much by *not* endorsing him, thus allowing him to win his majority on his own, out of Cuomo's (now smaller) shadow.

It will soon be George Bush's turn to discover what the Democratic pack has learned over the past two months: it is very, very hard to get a handle on Michael Dukakis. There are no rough edges, no jagged outcroppings to grab hold of. Dukakis is a candidate whose weaknesses are his strengths. If his character has hidden depths, if his soul has dark corners, no one has ever been able to find them—not even his wife, Kitty, who has called him "the most uncomplicated man in the world." The simplicity, banality, consistency, stolidity, matter-of-factness, and emotional equanimity that make him an unsuitable vehicle for political fervor also make him an elusive target for political attack. He is not exactly a cardboard cutout; his sense of himself is too firm and palpable for that. But the aspect he presents is sufficiently two-dimensional that to his opponents, who see him from the side, he is practically invisible. (Fortunately for him, television is a two-dimensional medium.)

Dukakis was the eye of the long hurricane of multi-candidate primaries. At the outset he established the well-financed, well-disciplined organization that, along with his own unflappable temperament, would enable him to absorb setbacks along the way. In speeches and debates he stuck to a series of propositions that made up in durability and unexceptionability what they utterly lacked in transcendence: I have a record of accomplishment, I have integrity, I have competence, I have brought "good jobs at good wages" to Massachusetts and I can do the same for the country. He then proceeded to put one foot in front of another. While he plodded, his opponents, who had no choice but to take larger risks, played with fire; and, one by one, they flared up and flamed out. They aimed their darts at each other, not least because Dukakis presented such a faint and elusive target. In the last desperate days in New York, Gore could find nothing better to attack Dukakis for than for not attacking Jackson.

Like Dukakis, Bush trod a cautious, steady, money-cushioned path to his own de facto nomination. Bush does not play with fire (though he has been known to sit unprotestingly through meetings with pyromaniacs), and Dukakis cannot count on the vice president to immolate himself. But Bush and the Republicans will have a hard time forcing Dukakis into the categories against which they have spent a generation perfecting their attacks. It will not be easy, for example, to depict Dukakis as a tax-raising paleoliberal who thinks the answer to every problem is a government spending program, because the emphasis of both his rhetoric and his record, at least since his second term as governor, has been on economic growth and on the use of state power to promote it equitably through the private sector. It will not be easy to depict him as a cultural radical, because his own style of life is such an eloquently homely affirmation of such middle-class values

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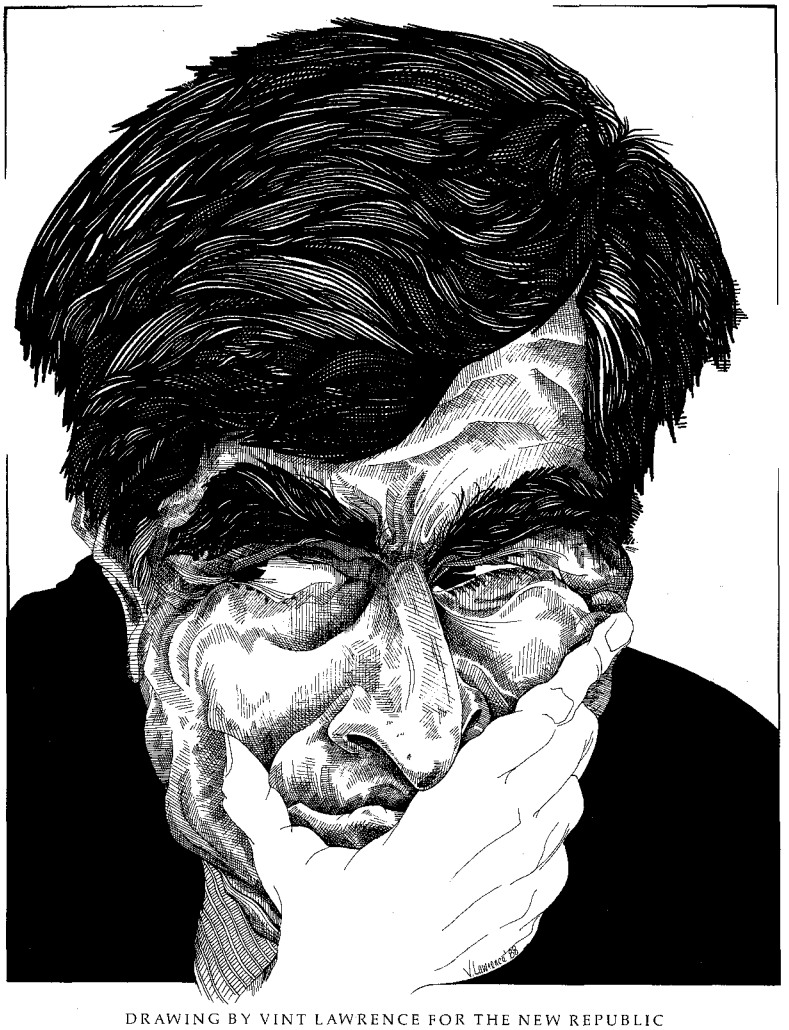
as work, family, neighborhood, and self-discipline. It will not be easy to depict him as a captive of "interest groups," because he has resisted the more egregious forms of pandering (for example, in his appearance before the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations in New York, he declined three opportunities to rule out the possibility of a Palestinian state), and because he has avoided the Mondale error of rhetorically slicing up the electorate into segments, making special appeals to each, and mistaking letterheads for constituencies.

The Republicans have already begun to target two areas of potentially serious Dukakis vulnerability, foreign policy and crime. But circumstances may help him to limit the damage. The recent spate of negotiated settlements or quasi-settlements—on European missiles, in Nicaragua, and in Afghanistan—tends to make the "strength" issue less useful for Bush even as it makes the "peace" issue less useful for Dukakis.



DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

On crime, Bush is sure to make much of the Massachusetts prison furlough program, under which at least two first-degree murderers escaped to repeat their crimes. That will hurt, and there's not much Dukakis can do about it. Bush is already calling for applying the death penalty to big drug traffickers, and Dukakis has always been an opponent of capital punishment. But Dukakis will be able to reply that some of the biggest drug lords, from Panama's Noriega on down, reaped their harvests of cocaine cash under what has amounted to a grant of immunity provided by the administration's eagerness to keep arms flowing to the *contras*.

Dukakis's greatest weakness—his famous inability to inspire—happens to be identical with Bush's. This is a lucky break for Dukakis (and for Bush too). In terms of what Bush perplexedly calls "the vision thing," the fall campaign will be a wash. Neither man is capable of saying—to all evidence, even of thinking about—how his presidency would advance the great romantic drama of American history. In place of a vision, Bush has the lift of a driving résumé. What Dukakis has is a set of proven personal qualities (competence, confidence, integrity), a set of comprehensible and relevant accomplishments for which the conventions of politics allow him to take credit (most notably the Massachusetts economic recovery), and, of course, the story of his own family's rise from poverty in Greece to prominence in America in a single generation.

For someone like Cuomo, the immigrant heritage is a fact that becomes a metaphor that becomes a vision. For Dukakis it remains a fact, albeit a moving one. As Dukakis has been telling audiences lately, "It says something about America that the two leading candidates for president are the son of Greek immigrants and a black man who grew up poor." (It also says something about America that the second fact, even at this late date, is more moving than the first.)

At Cuomo's urging, Dukakis made his immigrant ancestry part of his stump repertoire when he began running for president. Before that, he had seldom spoken of it. One reason, perhaps, was that Dukakis's experience growing up as a doctor's son amid the middle-class Jews and Irish of Brookline, the Boston suburb where he still lives, was more like that of a third-generation than a second-generation American. His father, Panos Dukakis, on his own made the jump that takes most immigrant families at least two generations, graduating from Harvard Medical School just 12 years after arriving in 1912, nearly penniless and unable to speak English at age 15. Dukakis's mother, Euterpe Boukis Dukakis, came to the United States and Massachusetts in 1913, when she was nine, and 12 years later she in turn had graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Bates College in Maine. By the time Michael was born in 1933, the Dukakis family's struggle for survival had been won.

Dukakis's ethnicity has been an unobtrusive but distinct asset to him in the presidential campaign. Compared with the full-bodied Cuomo vino, Dukakis is Ethnic Lite. There has never been as much native prejudice against Greeks in this country as there has been against such larger immi-

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THE KENNEDY SCHOOL CANDIDATE

I may be the only political writer in America who has had Michael Dukakis as a teacher. The class, which Dukakis taught at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, was labeled M-662, "Institutional Leadership and the Agency Manager." I took it in the fall of 1981, when Dukakis was already gearing up his successful 1982 campaign to return to the Massachusetts governorship.

It is often reported that during his enforced sabbatical, Dukakis taught about "public management," an unfortunate term that conjures up images of shriveled administrators with green eyeshades, feasting on arcane rules and regulations. But properly understood, "public management" is the art of turning rhetoric into reality: of taking the bold visions and promises of an election campaign and translating them into real programs.

Dukakis was a pretty good teacher, rated well by the students who took his class and by most of the other faculty. Dukakis will never rank with Max Weber or Herbert Simon as a theoretician of bureaucracy, but his course wasn't designed for that. M-662 attempted to teach students who hoped to become bureaucrats or elected officials how to do their jobs more effectively. So it concentrated on issues such as how to deal with the press, when to seek new legislative authority, how to determine what's really wrong with a failing agency, etc. There were lots of old war stories, of course, but usually they were good ones, relevant to the lessons he was trying to teach.

We've all heard the management rap before, particularly from Jimmy Carter. But there is an important difference between these two men. To Carter, good management was reading every line item in the defense budget, and scrutinizing every comma in every minor bill that crossed his desk. Dukakis taught that a political executive, particularly at the level of governor or president, must concentrate on a limited number of key issues, and avoid the temptation to "micromanage." Carter placed great faith in management gimmicks, such as government reorganization and zero-based budgeting. Dukakis expressed enormous skepticism about such devices. Carter believed that good public policy would emerge by bringing together lots of experts, and insulating them from "political" influences. Dukakis recognized that public management was inherently and indissolubly political.

Dukakis's second term as governor was dominated, as the local press pointed out, by a sense of "process" he picked up at the Kennedy School. And so, in important ways, is his presidential campaign. If Dukakis was less forthcoming than some of his rivals with specific policies and programs, one reason is that his candidacy is not premised on a laundry list of promises. He has strong convictions about some issues, but he also has firm ideas about how a chief executive should operate.

During the campaign Dukakis has had to rebut charges that, if elected, he would only be a "manager," not a leader. But this disjunction doesn't quite do justice to the issue. Jesse Jackson's concept of leadership is largely prophetic: a leader is someone who raises moral issues, who uplifts and inspires. To Gary Hart, leadership was almost entirely an intellectual matter: a leader helps the nation define its problems and points the way to new solutions. Dukakis's view of leadership is more closely tied to the everyday give-and-take of politics and government. By recruiting talented people, focusing their attention on specific priorities, and working closely with congressional and interest group leaders, Dukakis would try to create a process out of which good policies would emerge.

Unfortunately for Dukakis, the press and most other candidates operate as though the only task required of a president were to propose good policy ideas, which will somehow—effortlessly—get adopted and be implemented. Read the speeches of Jackson or the policy writings of Hart and you get the sense that neither has even begun to consider how to assemble a legislative coalition or work with a bureaucracy. Jackson's proclamation that he is a "tree-shaker, not a jelly-maker" amounts to an admission that the follow-through on his speeches is slipshod. Through almost five years of campaigning, Hart boasted about the fact that he was unable to get along with other elected officials.

Maybe the reason this campaign has failed to produce a "great new vision" of America is that no such vision exists. Bold visions are really appropriate only in times of serious crisis, like 1932. Though they may say otherwise in a poll, it is far from clear that most people really want a new vision. The public may not be content with the *results* of current policies, but when you ask them more detailed questions about specific proposals, they want, at most, marginal changes.

So maybe what the Democratic Party and the country need—though it sounds less interesting than "vision"—is a good manager: someone who would operate very much within the current system, perhaps move the country in a slightly more liberal direction, and above all make existing programs run more effectively.

Dukakis's widely praised Education and Training (ET) program is an example. Although the Democratic Party tried to promote ET as a "new idea," this was an absurd flight of rhetoric: Since when did helping welfare people get jobs become a new idea? In fact, Dukakis took a goal that a few thousand politicians have talked about, designed a good program to achieve it, and then implemented it well. The story wouldn't make a great movie—but it has helped thousands of Massachusetts welfare recipients, and might enable the Democratic Party to help the poor without incurring the charge that they support massive giveaways to shiftless welfare cheats. No one pretends that ET at all affects the hard-core underclass.

Of course the ideal candidate would have both the visionary qualities of a Reagan or Jackson and the managerial talent of a Dukakis. The question is whether Dukakis has learned the lessons of the Kennedy School a little too well.

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grant groups as Italians, Irish, or Jews. As an assimilated Greek-American Dukakis has succeeded in being a mirror for other ethnics without displeasing non-ethnics. In Brookline he was often taken for Jewish, an electoral advantage there. Through his first cousin Olympia Dukakis, who last month won an Academy Award for playing Cher's Italian mother in *Moonstruck*, he is a kind of honorary Italian. Though his religion is Greek Orthodox and his wife's is Jewish, he and his wife brought their children up in both traditions, and their ethic is quite thoroughly Protestant. Dukakis is a generic ethnic, far from unmeltable.

Besides Greek-Americans, who welcome him across party lines not merely as one of their own but also as a way to wipe away the dishonor of Spiro Agnew, one group that is sure to greet Dukakis's advent with enthusiasm is cartoonists. Dukakis is a caricature waiting to be drawn. He has oversized features on an oversized head, a trait he exaggerates by wearing suits so tight they look like they were spray-painted on. His needlelike trousers end at enormous, suspiciously thick-soled black shoes that resemble bumper cars. If he wins, his bushy eyebrows will join FDR's cigarette holder, Nixon's nose, Carter's teeth, and Reagan's pompadour in the cartoonists' pantheon.

Impressionists will like Dukakis too. It's easy to "do" him. First, pretend that your elbows are stapled to your sides. Then splay your hands as if you were holding a beach ball, or make a post-coin-flip fist. Then shake your head slowly, shrug slightly, and say in a rapid, faintly nasal, risingly inflected voice, "I happen to be a guy who believes deeply that if we're serious about creating good jobs at good wages, and I mean good jobs at good wages, then we've gotta do nationally what we did in Massachusetts."

DUKAKIS genuinely loves public policy—a quality that is easy to mock but is no more to be deplored in a politician than a love of auto mechanics is in a racing driver. He is a legitimate expert in it, at least in its domestic aspect, and in the processes by which it is forged. On this ground he is sure of himself, perhaps too sure.

After the most devastating experience of Dukakis's public life, his 1978 defeat for renomination as governor after his first term, he easily could have set himself up in a big law firm and made a pile of cash. But for him the pleasures of money are public, not private. (The private Dukakis would rather scrimp than accumulate.) Instead, he joined the faculty of Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

At Harvard he had every incentive to settle in as just another politician-in-residence. He could have spent his time working the phones and taking long lunches with his political friends as he plotted his comeback, and that was exactly what some of his new colleagues expected him to do.

Once appointed, Dukakis surprised everybody: he became a real teacher. He won over his suspicious colleagues with his seriousness, his diligence, and his modesty. "What made a real impression was his complete lack of egomania," says one ex-colleague, Steven Kelman. "He was perfectly indifferent to the lack of grandeur of his surroundings. His office was a cubbyhole. He shared a secretary. I'm sure it never entered his mind to complain about such things. He simply decided that as long as he was going to teach, he would do it right. He was accessible to students and junior faculty. He was a regular participant at faculty research seminars. He stood in line for lunch with everybody else. He didn't put on airs. It was almost touching."

HE TAUGHT a full schedule, even splitting one class into two sections when it was oversubscribed, doubling his workload. His reviews in the course evaluation guide published by the Kennedy School Student Association make interesting reading today for the glimpses they give of his character. One had this telling comment: "Several mentioned that Dukakis cut student comments short. 'In presenting "one man's view of the world" I occasionally felt that no other contradictory views would be strongly considered.' " But Dukakis's notices improved with time:

> M-662, INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND THE AGENCY MANAGER. Instructor: Dukakis.
>
> Students were highly impressed by Dukakis's personality and teaching effectiveness. They found him to be an "excellent," "outstanding," "first-rate," "super" instructor. *He was also described as a charismatic personality* who effectively conveyed to the class his interest and enthusiasm for the subject he was teaching. However, a few students mentioned that they found him opinionated. . . . Similarly, while the structure and content of the course were generally judged to be quite good, there were complaints about a bias in favor of the East Coast. (1981-82)

Italics mine. Of course, it may be that only someone who would voluntarily take a course with a title like "Institutional Leadership and the Agency Manager" could actually believe what Al Gore gracefully said in his withdrawal speech, that "competence is charisma."

The cliché about the Kennedy School is that it views politics with disdain, as an annoying impediment to the rational shaping of rational public policy. Be that as it may, Dukakis returned to the governorship in 1983 with a greater, not a lesser, aptitude for the rough and tumble. The arrogance, as his students noted, did not disappear entirely. But Dukakis did manage to transform himself from a stiff-backed confrontationist into a careful coalition-builder who looks for common ground with any potential allies, from a disdainer of schmoozing into a massager of legislators, from the Torquemada of patronage to its Toscanini. Despite the frequently drawn comparisons to Jimmy Carter, Dukakis as president would be extremely unlikely to blanket Capitol Hill with a blizzard of proposals unaccompanied by either consultation or follow-up. He would set priorities, budget his time and attention, cement his alliances beforehand, and limit his legislative goals to those that had a reasonable chance of achievement. Now that Dukakis is all but sure to be the nominee, Democrats, however relieved they may be, are also feeling a vague disappointment. But if Dukakis wins, Democrats may learn that it is better to be disappointed at the beginning than at the end. □

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STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Antagonists, New and Old

Colors is Hollywood fakery at its near-best. It begins with a sober factual epigraph: in Los Angeles two official groups, the L.A. Police Department and the L.A. County Sheriff's Department, are fighting street gangs, with a total of 250 men and women facing gangs that are said to have 70,000 members. Last year there were 387 gang-related killings. After this statistical start, *Colors* becomes a movie.

Colors
(Orion)

Da
(FilmDallas)

It's a generally well-made movie but traditional nonetheless, taming unruly material with familiar patterns. Central is the relationship between two policemen in a patrol car, who (as they take their accustomed filmic places) are the sage older one, Robert Duvall, and the impetuous younger one, Sean Penn. Duvall has served 19 years and is a year away from retirement, so we know that he will be killed. Penn is headstrong—he calls himself Rocky 6—so we know that he is in for chastening. He is also vain—he combs his hair as often as he pulls a gun—so we know that his cockerel stance will bring him a romance, probably with one of the "enemy."

The patterns are worked out, at the end, to make Penn the senior of a new pair who inducts the newcomer with a joke that Duvall once told him. (I first heard the joke, with milder diction, in a British war film—*The Dam Busters*, I think, in 1954.) But conventional though the patterns are, the dialogue, in black and Latino lingo, is topically hot and is heated further by contemporary street naturalism, which in fact is less "natural" than consciously theatrical; so the familiarity of the story is disguised by the crackle of the production.

Herbie Hancock's score beats at the picture like a stick propelling a hoop, particularly the title song, which doesn't refer to race but to the color identification of gangs. "We'll never die, / Just multiply," says the song, with increasing persuasion. The screenplay by Michael Schiffer, who wrote the not-so-original story with Richard DiLello, bedecks the genre with mod trimmings. Robert Estrin has edited with a quick scalpel. Each shot is just a shade shorter than we expect it to be, and there isn't a fade or dissolve in the whole film: we cut from sequence to sequence as abruptly as we cut from action to reaction within a sequence. Haskell Wexler, one of the world's best cinematographers (he did *Matewan*), gets little chance here to be more than highly serviceable, but occasionally there is a master touch. Example: a shot from a hilltop surveys L.A. skyscrapers, then pans down to a dismal street coming up the hill and a group of gang members coming up that street.

The director, Dennis Hopper, is now a Hollywood hero because reportedly he went through bad drug troubles, was rehabilitated, and came back. Lately he has been acting (*Hoosiers*, for instance); *Colors* is his first directing job in many years. He first directed *Easy Rider* in 1969, of which he was co-author and co-star, and despite the faults of that film, Hopper established himself as a triple-threat force. Then he turned that force against himself, in choice of films and style of life, and took nearly 20 years to recover. Hopper directed *Colors* with vitality and slam, with a lot of mobile shots from cars and helicopters and with a lot of mobility otherwise, too.

But there are flaws, which may be Schiffer's doing as much as his. Penn's romance, with a Latino waitress, is an arthritic nod to the box office. Two sex scenes, not theirs, are puzzlers. One couple is flailing away in a bedroom at the back of a house, and they don't stop even though the police have rapped on the front door and broken in. Another couple in another house keep at it in a bedroom even though there's been a machine-gun attack in the living room next door. In still another place, the police arrest a nude woman in a raid and take her away without letting her put on a stitch. When a street kid is spread-eagled by Penn against a wall, on the wall is a mural of Christ with arms similarly outstretched. Penn is given a chance to show heart by playing with one of Duvall's children. When a motorcycle plunges through the window of a restaurant, none of the customers is hurt. Of course there are car chases—in this story they're unavoidable—but once again most of them are through streets that are conveniently empty.

What keeps *Colors* seemingly solid even when it's only celluloid is the cast. The variegated gang roles, all black or Latino, are vividly done and are choreographed like a hopeless, vicious ballet. To balance the film racially—and, I'm sure, factually—Hopper shows us blacks and Latinos in uniform, including some commanding officers.

Penn, not a flexible or appealing actor, uses his abrasive presence in an interesting way: to portray a young cop who *knows* he's abrasive and underscores it as a means to do a job and make a mark. He's not remotely a psychopath, just a young man full of his body, so to speak, who resents and yet is secretly impressed by the discipline that Duvall lays on him. To see Duvall playing opposite him, matching him point for point in the Penn game, then moving on to include some camp-counselor colors, is to see an excellent actor selecting a range from within himself that fits the occasion. Penn does—quite well—just about all

FILMS WORTH SEEING

A Taxing Woman. Juzo Itami's screenplay—about a woman tax inspector in Tokyo—wanders in tale and tone, but it's smartly directed and acted. (Reviewed 5/2/88)

The Unbearable Lightness of Being. Those who haven't read Milan Kundera's novel may enjoy it more than others—who can find solace in three engaging performances. (2/29/88)

White Mischief. High-comedy recreation of the actual murder of an earl by a baronet in Kenya, 1941. The style, well sustained, is the film. (4/11/88)

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that he can do. Duvall, who has done Dr. Watson, a German army officer, a Southern farmer, a Texas country singer, an Italian immigrant, and more, here chooses still another spectrum, another self. In our first glimpse of him he is merely washing his face in the police washroom, then reaching for a paper towel, yet we know that this is the beginning of a performance that began in the actor's mind long before Scene One.

Still, *Colors* is basically just one more run-through of an old Hollywood exercise: the exploitation of a violent subject, sanctimoniously sprinkled with a little social comment. At a community meeting, some black people tell the police that what their kids need is jobs, not busting. At a gang meeting, one member tells a social worker that the gang is the only family he has and that, law or no law, he'll never leave it. But these statements weigh about as heavily as the closing statement they used to put at the end of 1930s gangster flicks in which, after 90 minutes of machine-guns and grenades, we were told that Crime Does Not Pay.

Da, Hugh Leonard's play that he has made into a screenplay, deals with the tug and affection between an Irishman around 40 and his lately deceased father. ("Da" is the Irish equivalent of "dad.") The son, a successful playwright in America, comes home to Dublin for his father's funeral and finds, without surprise, that the old man reappears, to bully and tease and cajole even after his death. Most of the film is flashback through the years to show how the love-antagonism was formed.

It's all done neatly enough. (One inconsistency nags: in the flashbacks the son is seen at various ages, but the father is always his old self.) But *Da*, thin on stage, is still thin on screen. Leonard has reportedly written about his own father, and the man is more interesting to him than to us. All the exploration of Da only reveals him to be more and more clearly a narrow, crabbed, somewhat stupid man, a nonentity of a gardener who, on closer examination, remains a nonentity. I attribute the play's success, which it has had, to the inexhaustible pathos of the revenant device, rather than to any intrinsics in Da or his dealings with his son.

Barnard Hughes, who plays Da and played him on Broadway, is an actor of long experience but little charm, so he can't do much to make up for the lacks in the character as given. The same is true of Martin Sheen as the (grown) son. □

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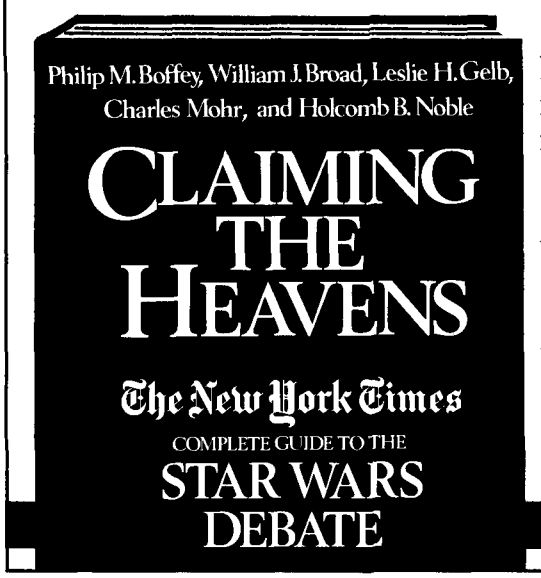
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ROBERT BRUSTEIN ON THEATER

Artistic Injustice

Nothing arouses liberal Americans more than a perception of injustice. But while people of goodwill are always ready to express their outrage over wrongs in the legal, social, moral, and political spheres, they seem to be curiously indifferent toward injustices in the world of art. Correspondence columns of newspapers and magazines are usually filled with resentment over real and imagined slights to women, blacks, Jews, Hispanics, gays, the homeless, and the handicapped. But you'll rarely find much rancor expressed toward a critic who has misjudged a fine play or vilified a gifted actor, unless of course the criticism has offended minority interests as well. Uncertain of their own aesthetic opinions, laymen are excessively deferential before the "expert"—usually one powerful newspaper critic in every major city. But even when the "experts" are more numerous, they have an unspoken rule not to challenge each other in print, in the same way physicians are secretly pledged to respect each other's incompetence.

Without such challenges, theater artists will continue to be among the few figures in our culture without either champions or lobbyists, helpless targets for whoever controls the critical arsenal. Playwrights, directors, and actors, of course, have the right to respond personally to what they perceive to be unjust press treatment. But those who avail themselves of this privilege are usually thought to be harvesting sour grapes. Women protesting sexism or blacks protesting racism are speaking for masses of people, often with the sympathetic support of other groups and individuals. But the protesting theater artist is regarded as a self-interested soloist singing a cappella arias to skeptical ears.

Why don't enlightened Americans express themselves more often in defense of unfairly treated theater people? One obvious answer is that they don't take theater very seriously. Indeed, they don't really take the arts very seriously. As Arthur Schlesinger Jr. noted recently, in a speech calling for a national arts policy, we Americans cannot seem to overcome the notion that the arts are a superfluous luxury. Dispensable as a frill, they are even more expendable when appearing to constitute a threat. Any new work of value is unlikely to collect a consensus, and while our society is usually willing to tolerate radical or dissenting political voices, it is considerably less supportive of what may be metaphysical questioning of the very absolutes that hold the polity together. I suspect that democratic America is suspicious of the "elitist" characteristics of artists: their special gifts, their sometimes idiosyncratic behavior, their potential for wide recognition, their ability (so rare in our industrial-mercantile society) to do the work they love and believe in.

Artistic injustice, of course, is hardly limited to our country or our time. It characterizes virtually every chapter in the history of modern drama. Ibsen suffered alone when, after *A Doll's House* and *Ghosts*, he was accused of debauching the body politic. (*An Enemy of the People* was written partly to dramatize his enforced isolation.) Strindberg, following *Married* and *The Father*, became an exile and a pariah for alleged offenses against feminism (so, by the way, did Euripedes). Nobody defended Chekhov after critics assailed his first production of *The Seagull* or when the Maly Theater refused to stage *Uncle Vanya* unless he excised the satire on pompous professors. Few protested when Pirandello decided to produce his plays in Germany because of their hostile reception in Italy. And following the premiere of Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, Yeats stood alone on stage shouting "You have disgraced yourselves again" at the rioting audience, which found it a libel of Irish life.

Still, a good riot and outraged rejection are preferable to the kind of passive indifference that greets theater production in this country, where no one has the energy or inclination to dispute prevailing critical views. And while such theater artists as Robert Wilson and Andrei Serban are able to find in Europe the recognition that still eludes them in this country, American audiences continue to let critics determine the pastures where sheep may safely graze. The absolute power of critics has often been noted and occasionally deplored. But like all such autocracies, it is maintained only when good people remain silent. The result of this deafening silence is critical authority based neither on credentials nor accountability, which leaves the artist feeling like a convicted felon without an appeals court, doomed by a judgment with no basis in law—the victim, in short, of artistic injustice.

Artistic injustice can be caused not only by failing to recognize distinguished work, but also by overpraising work of lower quality, a condition linked to the power of current minority protest. With so many pressure groups on the alert for any deviations from approved behavior or opinion, many intelligent people have been cowed into hedging their opinions, with the result that moral and aesthetic categories are now considerably confused. Liberal Americans, with their utilitarian, puritanical heritage, have traditionally regarded art (and education) as valid largely as an instrument of social betterment, if not political change. Now the situation has reached a point where "good works" rather than good works of art, benevolent intentions rather than intrinsic quality, have become the major criterion of value and reward.

Artists (and intellectuals) are respected only insofar as they can help to redress the grievances of society, while artistic institutions (and universities) are esteemed not for advancing culture (or preserving thought) so much as for the way they address racial issues, problems of divestiture, and minority hiring. Funds for resident theaters are reserved for "outreach" programs and variously interpreted "Third World" projects; arts and humanities curricula are radically revised to accommodate the sometimes openly ideological aims of feminist scholarship and black and Hispanic studies; award-granting committees are hectored to offer prizes on the basis of sex or race.

In such a charged atmosphere, where expletives like "racist" and "sexist" are replacing reasoned argument, artistic and educational institutions are being pressured to do the work of social and political agencies, while sophisticated people have become responsible for a great deal of hypocritical cant. Equality of opportunity, though making significant progress, remains our most pressing domestic goal, and every liberal American should be dedicated to realizing it. But it is through the political process that real change comes about, not through overvaluating inferior works of art for the sake of inflating minority pride; and it demeans the genuine minority artists in our midst to apply affirmative action

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critical standards to those who have not yet earned society's glittering prizes.

Perhaps because it is such a public forum, it is in the theater that such loose standards are most conspicuous. There, female playwrights are praised for condemning the insensitivity of males, and homosexual playwrights for excoriating the gay-bashing of straights, and black playwrights for identifying the racial injustice of whites, and Jewish playwrights for scoring the imperialism of the West—and white male heterosexual gentile playwrights for confessing malice toward all, through public displays of anguished conscience. To judge by our stage, 20th-century America must be the most unjust society in history; and to judge by what moves us drama critics to praise, a play's importance is measured not by the depth of the writing or the range of the acting, but by the breadth of the indictment. I apologize for heaping another load of sand on this mountain of accusation. But I fear a major casualty of affirmative action criticism is disinterested evaluation—and respect for the truth, which is a cardinal tenet of criticism and a fundamental impulse of art.

Do I exaggerate? Don't critics have a right to their opinions, however sectional or uninformed? Does artistic injustice account for anything more painful than bruised or inflated egos—hardly serious conditions when compared with the plight of the homeless and the underprivileged? It is true that the undervaluation of artists today is not likely to cause the kind of economic hardship suffered, say, by van Gogh, who sold only two paintings in his lifetime. But it can cause serious spiritual hardship, and this affects us all. In a time of orthodoxy, where can we look but to the creative imagination for an antidote to the lies that are daily introduced into our society? It is the inspired artist, compelled by a need to speak the hard and often dismal truth, who keeps us honest, and when the artist languishes in disappointment or despair, the falsehoods mount.

As Schlesinger concluded in his speech on national arts policy, "The United States will be measured in the eyes of posterity not by its economic power nor by its military might, not by the territories it has annexed nor by the battles it has won, but by its character and achievement as a civilization." If enlightened people do not soon act to represent an appeals court in review of artistic injustice, our civilization is in danger of becoming an object of historical scorn.

The achievement of Richard Wilbur.

MASTER OF METAPHOR

BY ANTHONY HECHT

"The work of art is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis*," observed Wittgenstein. And since today there are critics who maintain that art and criticism are indistinguishable from one another, it ought to follow that the critical work itself is seen from the same august perspective. Yet our experience of the history of criticism and the morphology of aesthetic theory fails conspicuously to support this view. Nothing is more familiar to us than the changes in the mode of taste that time itself seems to bring round in its course. Bach endured an eclipse of 200 years, and Richard Ellmann has recently told us that for the undergraduate Oscar Wilde, Keats and Swinburne (whom modern readers would only reluctantly identify with one another) were akin in the "effeminacy and languor and voluptuousness which are the characteristics of that 'passionate humanity' which is the background of true poetry." In the comparatively brief course of my lifetime, John Donne's reputation was virtually disinterred, and the Romantics are now enjoying a revival. And I suppose I should add that it must take a very curious and cultivated taste to enjoy reading criticism of Wordsworth as much as reading Wordsworth himself, though I have known such creatures. (They are desperate graduate students, and no less desperate professors.)

New and Collected Poems
by Richard Wilbur
(Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 393 pp., $27.95)

These ruminations are brought on by the publication of Richard Wilbur's *New and Collected Poems*, and by a wistful desire to arrive at a large and serene view of his accomplishment, the crowning of a long and distinguished career. (Just how distinguished is hard to assess, but apart from his many honors, awards, and appointments, I can note here that the 14th edition of Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations* contains 107 lines of his work.) I am already on record as a somewhat defensive admirer of his, having reviewed his last book of poems, *The Mind-Reader* (1976). And while that review attempted to offer a view of his entire poetic career up to that point (apart from his translations of French drama), I have no desire now to serve up warmed-over views, or to engage again in the parochial and tribal battles that are often waged between rival schools and camps of current poetic taste. Wilbur's distinctions do not need to be set off by the infelicities of others, and his work is by now so well known, and so widely honored, that I can spare the reader a repetition of the formulaic terms of praise that have become the logos and labels of critical approval of his work.

The new book presents all of his previous volumes in reverse order, concluding with his first book, *The Beautiful Changes and Other Poems* (1947)—the same order in which his poems were arranged in the, by now, familiar assemblage, *The Poems of Richard Wilbur*, which brought together everything from the first book to *Advice to a Prophet and Other Poems* (1961). The present volume reprints everything heretofore collected and adds to it the contents of two subsequent volumes, *Walking to Sleep: New Poems and Translations* (1969) and *The Mind-Reader*, and adds to them a volume of new poems with which this rich and impressive collection begins. This new work bears all the hallmarks of excellence that have stamped Wilbur's previous work: a kinetic imagination that is rare among poets, as well as an unusually rich and fertile gift for metaphor. I share with Aristotle a view of the importance of this gift, and cite him accordingly as follows:

> It is a great thing, indeed, to make a proper use of these poetical forms, as also of compound and strange words. But the greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is one thing that cannot be learnt from others; and it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilars.

When I try to make a mental list of the major English and American poets from, say, the turn of the century on, I find

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myself unable to come up with a single one who can match Wilbur in this regard. Each good poet, of course, has his own unique merits, his own vision, style, and idiom. And good poets do not cancel one another out; if we like Blake we are not thereby forbidden to like Marvell as well. But I can think of no other poet who could do what Wilbur does metaphorically in the following poem, "An Event," from *Things of This World*:

As if a cast of grain leapt back to the hand,
A landscapeful of small black birds, intent
On the far south, convene at some
command
At once in the middle of the air, at once are
gone
With headlong and unanimous consent
From the pale trees and fields they settled
on.

What is an individual thing? They roll
Like a drunken fingerprint across the sky!
Or so I give their image to my soul
Until, as if refusing to be caught
In any singular vision of my eye
Or in the nets and cages of my thought,

They tower up, shatter, and madden space
With their divergences, are each alone
Swallowed from sight, and leave me in this
place
Shaping these images to make them stay:
Meanwhile, in some formation of their
own,
They fly me still, and steal my thoughts
away.

Delighted with myself and with the birds,
I set them down and give them leave to be.
It is by words and the defeat of words,
Down sudden vistas of the vain attempt,
That for a flying moment one may see
By what cross-purposes the world is
dreamt.

There is a great deal that might be said about this poem, but I will confine myself to two observations. In its ingenious, philosophic course it plays with the pre-Socratic puzzle of "the One" and "the Many," a playfulness that is carefully carried out in such words as "their image" (which is both singular and plural), "singular vision" (s.), "divergences" (pl.), "alone" (s.), "images" (pl.), and "formation" (both s. and pl.). And then in the course of our progress we come to that matchless simile in answer to the question, "What is an individual thing?" "They roll / Like a drunken fingerprint across the sky!" There isn't a poet I can think of who would not have been overjoyed by a *trouvé* of that sort. It is breathtakingly vivid, accurate, and most astonishingly, *in motion*.

But Wilbur then proceeds to do what

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virtually no other poet would have the courage to do: he, in effect, throws it away. Or in any case declares that this is only one, and perhaps an imperfect, way to formulate what may in the end defy formulation. He allows the seriousness of his epistemological or metaphysical puzzle to take precedence over any incidental felicities that might be encountered along the way. This *sprezzatura* would be reckless in another poet. But Wilbur's government of his enormous resources is what makes this poem (as well as many others) a triumph over its local details, and an amalgamation that is wonderfully greater than the sum of its parts. The Eleatic auditors of Zeno would have been delighted.

It seems worth adding that the theme of this poem—the delicate and necessarily imperfect attempt at an equation between the exterior world and the human faculties that apprehend and try to "render" it—is one that has preoccupied Wilbur almost from the first and figures beautifully in such an early stanza as this one:

> Sycamore, trawled by the tilt sun,
> Still scrawl your trunk with tattered lights, and keep
> The spotted toad upon your patchy bark,
> Baffle the sight to sleep,
> Be such a deep
> Rapids of lacing light and dark,
> My eye will never know the dry disease
> Of thinking things no more than what he sees.

It's a theme that recurs in "A Fire Truck," "The Mill," "Digging for China," "The Beacon," "A Plain Song for Comadre," and "Altitudes." In an era when a lot of supremely pompous things have been claimed for the omnipotence of language, it is refreshing in the work of so accomplished a poet to encounter an acknowledgment of "the defeat of words" in the face of the richness and multiplicity of an external reality that will always supersede and evade the limitations of our vocabulary, however well deployed. So there is to such poems a salutary and characteristic humility that is in itself attractive, and in turn points to something else about Wilbur's poetry that is worth remarking on, though I approach it with a certain tentativeness.

It has to do with the character of the man within or behind the poems; with how and to what degree that man gets expressed, if at all. This is a matter both delicate and controversial. There is an impressive body of modern thought that maintains there is no necessary connection between the work of art and the artist's nature, character, or history. Wilde, for one, maintained this view, and it seems implicit in Eliot's theory of the "impersonality" of art. It is a view Auden adopted in the stanzas he later deleted from his elegy to Yeats—the lines in which he declares:

> Time that is intolerant
> Of the brave and innocent,
> And indifferent in a week
> To a beautiful physique,
>
> Worships language and forgives
> Everyone by whom it lives;
> Pardons cowardice, conceit,
> Lays its honors at their feet.

The same view is expressed by Shaw in his preface to *The Doctor's Dilemma* in these words:

> No man who is occupied in doing a very difficult thing, and doing it very well, ever loses his self-respect. . . . The common man may have to found his self-respect on sobriety, honesty, and industry; but . . . an artist needs no such props for his sense of dignity. . . . The truth is, hardly any of us have ethical energy enough for more than one really inflexible point of honor. . . . An actor, a painter, a composer, an author, may be as selfish as he likes without reproach from the public if only his art is superb; and he cannot fulfill this condition without sufficient effort and sacrifice to make him feel noble and martyred in spite of his selfishness.

It is quite wonderful to think how widespread is this doctrine among some artists of very doubtful merit; and we are likely to find it so familiar that it will seem a curiously modern attitude, but it isn't. Plutarch reports in his *Life* of Pericles: "Antisthenes . . . when he was told that Ismenias played excellently on the flute, answered very properly, 'Then he is good for nothing else; otherwise he would not have played so well.' "

Yet this view is by no means universally shared, and it is generally felt that though precision in the matter is impossible, the work of art bears some important imprint of the spirit and inmost life of its maker. And so, by way of facing a puzzle that I have never comfortably resolved, I present two Wilbur poems, the first of them, "Still, Citizen Sparrow," from a volume of 1950:

> Still, citizen sparrow, this vulture which you call
> Unnatural, let him but lumber again to air
> Over the rotten office, let him bear
> The carrion ballast up, and at the tall
>
> Tip of the sky lie cruising. Then you'll see
> That no more beautiful bird is in heaven's height,
> No wider more placid wings, no watchfuller flight;
> He shoulders nature there, the frightfully free,
>
> The naked-headed one. Pardon him, you
> Who dart in orchard aisles, for it is he
> Devours death, mocks mutability,
> Has heart to make an end, keeps nature new.
>
> Thinking of Noah, childheart, try to forget
> How for so many bedlam hours his saw
> Soured the song of birds with its wheezy gnaw,
> And the slam of his hammer all the day beset
>
> The people's ears. Forget that he could bear
> To see the towns like coral under the keel,
> And the fields so dismal deep. Try rather to feel
> How high and weary it was, on the waters where
>
> He rocked his only world, and everyone's.
> Forgive the hero, you who would have died
> Gladly with all you knew; he rode that tide
> To Ararat; all men are Noah's sons.

And now, in juxtaposition, a poem called "A Wood," published in a volume nearly 20 years later:

> Some would distinguish nothing here but oaks,
> Proud heads conversant with the power and glory
> Of heaven's rays or heaven's thunderstrokes,

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> Who knows if they sing in their webs
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> without thinking and intends to race
> the winged ones through the stickiest place.
> Cock your head; when you squint, the
> light will throw you reasonable prey,
> what you deserve, a gleam, a solo look,
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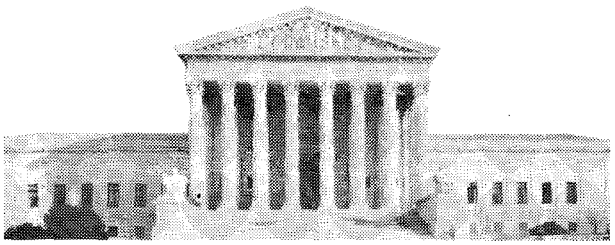

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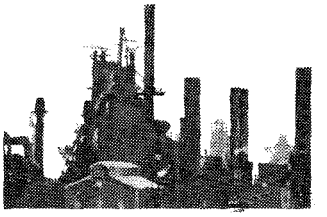

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And adumbrators to the understory,
Where, in their shade, small trees of modest leanings
Contend for light and are content with gleanings.

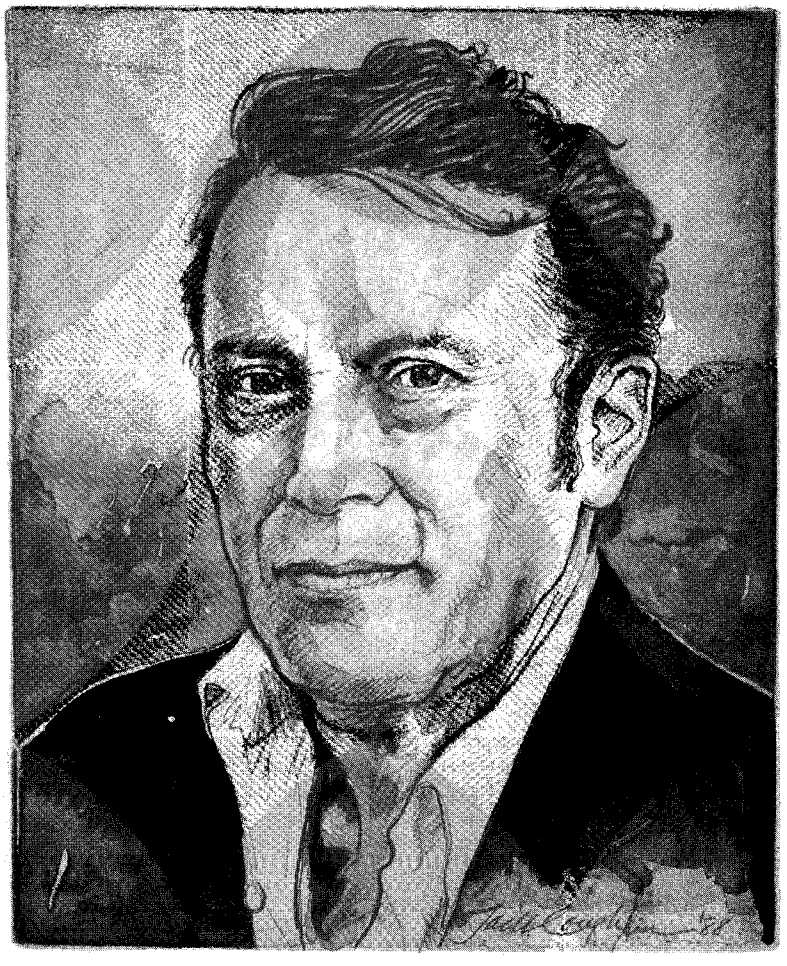
And yet here's dogwood: overshadowed, small,
But not inclined to droop and count its losses,
It cranes its way to sunlight after all,
And signs the air of May with Maltese crosses.
And here's witch hazel, that from underneath
Great vacant boughs will bloom in winter's teeth.

Given a source of light so far away
That nothing, short or tall, comes very near it,
Would it not take a proper fool to say
That any tree has not the proper spirit?
Air, water, earth and fire are to be blended,
But no one style, I think, is recommended.

These poems probably were not composed to be matched and mated, and yet they do form a pair by dint of theme and contrast. They are both symbolic poems in which some aspect of nature takes part in a little allegorical pageant, exhibiting human attitudes in a manner that we've become familiar with from poems like Robert Frost's "Spring Pools." And even though there was a long interval between their appearances, it is possible to think of them as a sort of diptych, as poems that face each other and quarrel in a friendly way, as do Milton's "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso"; though here we are prompted to wonder if the alternative postures presented by the two Wilbur poems are the consequence of a change of attitude on the part of the poet, or simply an attempt, as in Milton's case, to set up an antiphonal or dialogic relationship.

The question seems worth raising partly because there is something disturbing in the earlier, and in my view, the less successful, of these Wilbur poems. There is, for one thing, a curiously Jacobin flavor to the opening words and the title, suggesting the bloodthirsty resentment of some revolutionary leveler and vengeful egalitarian. The very first word, "Still," invites us to suppose that the speaker is now countering a long and detailed diatribe of condemnation with a word that means, "In spite of everything you say . . ." The *citoyen* is asked to admire his grotesque and more powerful rival and predator, whose ugliness, at a sufficiently great distance, will not be discernible. This powerful enemy "has heart to make an end" in that he finishes off his rivals, and in this way, it is claimed for him, "keeps nature new." I can't help feeling there is something frightful about this, and the more frightful in that we, and the *citoyen*, are being asked to admire and forgive it. In some way that is to me quite unpersuasive, this creature is identified as "the hero," and further identified with Noah, who, like the vulture, survives the hideous death of everyone else. Nothing is hinted about the merit of Noah and the wickedness of mankind to account for this introduction into the poem of a biblical story.

The poem seems to be about the elect who succeed and survive, in contrast to the masses who perish and are undeserving. Indeed, the biblical citation seems totally unexpected, and by no means easy to assimilate. There is a species of social Darwinism going on here "to which / The ripped mouse, safe in the owl's talon, cries / Concordance," in the words of Wilbur's poem "Beasts." I can't believe that this is a skewed or perverse reading of the poem, which seems to invite a sort of class distinction and exclusiveness. In any case, one cannot help feeling that the parable of the trees in "A Wood" is a great deal more charitable and generous than the parable of the birds in "Still, Citizen Sparrow."



DRAWING BY JACK COUGHLIN FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

This is the more striking in that, as opposed to the violence, insolence, and outright repulsiveness with which any number of poets now assault us, Wilbur's work has been characterized from the first by an admirable capacity to praise. "Obscurely yet most surely called to praise," begins one of his earliest poems. Long ago there used to be a commonplace belief that the end of art was precisely to delight ("Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not"). This did not mean, of course, that art was therefore purged of any taint of unpleasantness, presenting instead a dilute and sentimental version of existence, any more than Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is free from villainy. But, in Keats's formulation, "The excellency of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate"; by which, I assume, he means that even the most terrible matters could be redeemed by their assimilation into art.

Wilbur's poems have exhibited over the years an impressive capacity to confront the shocking, the appalling, the grotesque. Among his finest poems are the powerful dramatic monologues from which his last two books take their titles: *Walking to Sleep* and *The Mind-Reader*, each of which deals with terrors of dif-

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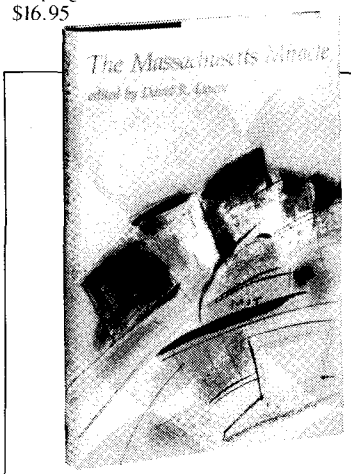

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ferent sorts. It is an index, in fact, of Wilbur's growth as an artist that his emotional range has become increasingly ample over the years. If there could be said to be any characteristic limitations to his early work, they might be described as a sort of runaway mellifluousness, a Hopkinsian/Swinburnian/Tennysonian drench of language:

> A script of trees before the hill
> Spells cold, with laden serifs; all the walls
> Are battlemented still;
> But winter spring is winnowing the air
> Of chill, and crawls
> Wet-sparkling on the gutters;
> Everywhere
> Walls wince, and there's a steal of waters.
>
> Now all this proud royaume
> Is Veniced. Through the drift's mined dome
> One sees the rowdy rusted grass,
> And we're amazed as windows striken bright.
> This too-long spring will pass
> Perhaps tonight . . .

I don't mean that there's anything "wrong" with this, though it is perhaps a little more "mannered" than the later poems, and the calligraphy of the trees is less convincing than the fingerprint of that flock of birds in flight. Even here there is in "spells" a pun of the sort that will continue to inhabit Wilbur's poems throughout his career. His puns are serious and serviceable, and only occasionally comic; they are a major feature of his work, as are Shakespeare's "quibbles," which are the despair of translators. It was this sort of ambiguity and multivalenced power of words that led Tolstoy to his impatient dismissal of *King Lear* and his assertion that Shakespeare was "only playing with words." But, in a deeply serious way, that is actually what all good poets do: words are their only instruments to convey what is not easily conveyed by words alone. To resort to abusive epithets such as "artifice" or "dandy" is merely to embrace one convention and use it to bludgeon another that is equally valid.

Those who in past years have been stinting in their approval of Wilbur have pointed to his universally admired translations of classic French drama and have gone on to declare that this dated, formalized sensibility perfectly accords with his own tendencies to precision and stateliness. But I remember as an undergraduate reading Molière done, or rather, done in, by Louis Untermeyer in a translation that the veriest lout would recognize as doggerel. And since Wilbur's versions have become available there is no self-respecting production that would resort to another.

The linguistic gifts that have made possible these superb translations from 17th-century French are also at work in the collections of lyric poems, which contain Wilbur's translations from French, Latin, Russian, Spanish, and Italian poems, dating from the fourth or fifth century to the work of his contemporaries. This latitude of sympathy for poets sometimes very idiosyncratic and different from one another (for example, Villon and Voltaire) is itself an expression of Wilbur's reach and suggests that like another American poet, he "contains multitudes."

THE NEW POEMS that are now added to his six previous collections are as rich, varied, and accomplished as we have come to expect, and in addition he has risked, successfully, an admirable departure from his usual practice. Wilbur has written texts for musical settings before, and with great effect. Two very fine examples that come to mind are "A Christmas Hymn" and Pangloss's song about syphilis for the comic opera *Candide*. But now Wilbur has written a more extended text for a full cantata in celebration of the Statue of Liberty. It was written for the composer William Schuman, is divided into five sections, runs to a total of 102 lines, and is called "On Freedom's Ground." It seems to me to succeed wonderfully where anyone else I can think of would have failed. And the task was rife with potential pitfalls. There were the twin perils of jingoism and chauvinistic sentimentality on the one hand, and the symmetrical or compensatory danger of leaning over backward to avoid anything that looked suspiciously like "affirmation."

But over and above these was the problem of writing an extensive text for music. Many poets, and not a few composers, are likely to be obtuse in these matters. Poets incline to want to hang on to syntactical complexity and sinuousness, to resist end-stopped lines that these days are regarded as artificial, identified with 18th-century heroic couplets, verse epigrams, and plain lack of breath. Composers are sometimes too eager to find texts by poets of stature that are also short enough to set, and in consequence are likely to come up all too quickly with one of the more enigmatic and impenetrable of Emily Dickinson's poems, simply because it was written in

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the old hymnal quatrains, and thus seems eminently settable. Of modern poets Yeats may have been the most intuitive and plausible about writing for music, knowing somehow that he would have to simplify his ways if he wanted his auditors to grasp anything of what he wrote while having to attend to a vocal performance of music with accompaniment.

Wilbur has risked this kind of dangerous simplicity and straightforwardness, and has done so with great success. He has ingeniously made use of the device of the catalog, a genuine relief to a listener's need to follow the thread of an argument or a narrative, and he has cunningly and discreetly worked a famous phrase of Martin Luther King Jr.'s into the fabric of his text, where it is surely but unostentatiously resonant. The cantata stands at the end of this new collection, separated from the rest and intended to be recognized for what it is: something written in a special, ceremonial, accessible idiom that will give the composer room to do some creative work of his own, and command some part of the listener's attention.

BEFORE addressing the admirable new poems that open this volume I must confess that I am puzzled by a passage in one of Wilbur's loveliest and most celebrated poems, "A Baroque Wall-Fountain in the Villa Sciarra." After presenting a contrasting set of fountains, the poet returns to his *fons et origo* and asks:

> What of these showered fauns in their bizarre,
> Spangled, and plunging house?
> They are at rest in fulness of desire
> For what is given, they do not tire
> Of the smart of the sun, the pleasant water-douse
> And riddled pool below,
> Reproving our disgust and our ennui
> With humble insatiety.
> Francis, perhaps, who lay in sister snow
> Before the wealthy gate
> Freezing and praising, might have seen in this
> No trifle, but a shade of bliss—

But the account of Saint Francis on which these lines depend, and which comes from the anonymous *Little Flowers*, does not confirm what Wilbur says in his poem. The relevant passage goes this way:

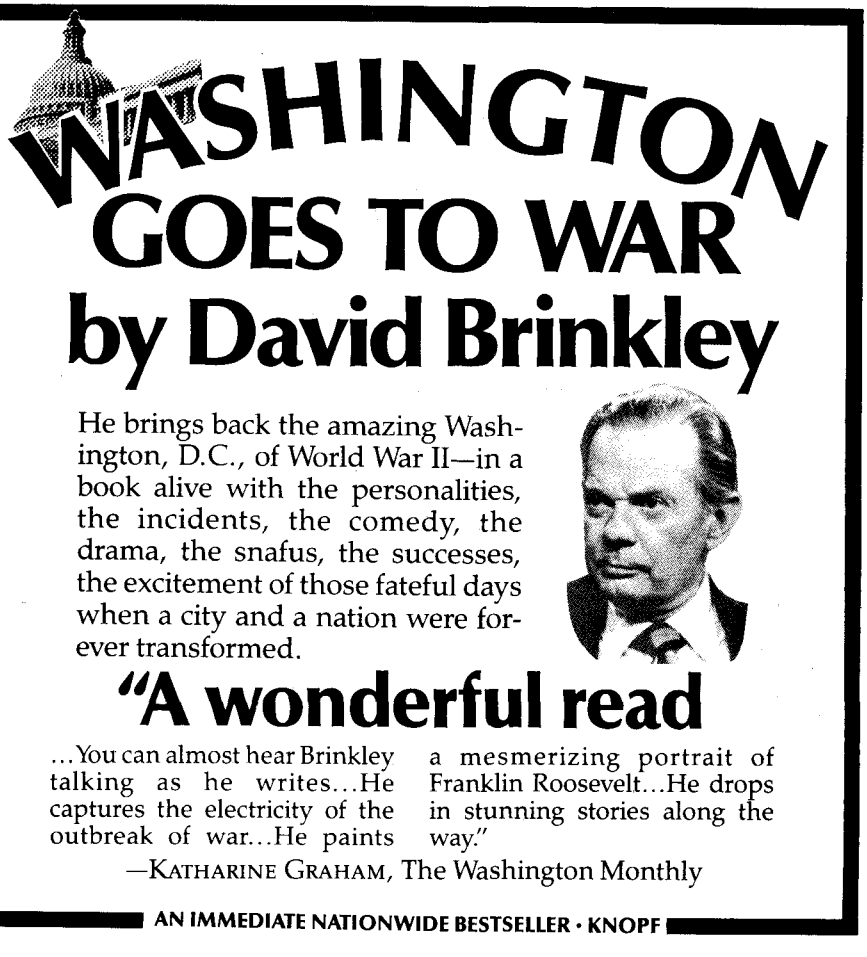
> One winter day Saint Francis was walking with Brother Leo from Perugia to Saint Mary of the Angels, the Portiuncula. The very sharp cold made him suffer greatly, and he called to Brother Leo, who was walking ahead, and said: "Even though the Minor Brothers may set everywhere a fine example of holiness and edification, nevertheless write this down, and note carefully, that that does not make for perfect joy."
>
> And a little farther on Saint Francis called to him again: "O Brother Leo, even if the Minor Brothers should make the blind see, straighten crooked limbs, drive out demons, and make the deaf hear, the lame walk, the dumb speak, and—the greatest miracle—raise to life the four days dead, write that therein does not consist perfect joy."

After still more of these repudiations of what might have been thought the grounds for perfect joy, poor Brother Leo impatiently breaks out with "Father, I beg you, for God's sake, to tell me wherein lies perfect joy," and Francis answers as follows:

> When we arrive at Saint Mary of the Angels, soaked by rain and frozen by cold, spattered with mud and tortured with hunger; if when we knock at the convent door, the porter comes angrily and says: "Who are you?" and we say: "We are two of your brothers"; and he says: "That is not true; you are a couple of tramps who go around fooling people and stealing the alms intended for the poor. So get out!" And when he won't open to us and he makes us stay outside till night, hungry in the snow and rain and cold—then if we bear all these rebuffs and cruel insults with patience, without answering back, and if we think with humility and charity that this doorkeeper really knows us, but God commands him to repulse us—then, O Brother Leo, write that there is perfect joy.

The new collection opens with a superb poem called "The Ride," which continues a kind of obsessional theme that Wilbur has made characteristically his own: the poem that plays on the delicate and tenuous relationship between dream and waking. Readers of his work will know how this subject has preoccupied him in such poems as "Love Calls Us to the Things of This World," "In Limbo," "Walking to Sleep," "For Ellen," and "Marginalia," for example. The subtle changes between different states of consciousness are a rich source for poetry, and many of the best modern poets have worked the region with success, but none, I think, as successfully as Wilbur.

He also presents us with a translation of a poem by Joseph Brodsky called "Six Years Later," which Brodsky chose to open his most recent collection, *A Part of*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Speech. It is a love poem of great formality, and with an ingenuity of metaphoric structure that is distinctly reminiscent of the poems of Donne. Brodsky was from very early in his career a great admirer of Donne, for whom he wrote an elegy. And it is no small accomplishment on Wilbur's part to have translated a poem from the Russian that allows the influence of the 17th-century poet to exhibit itself in a modern and modulated way.

I should add that Wilbur's translation, also included, of Apollinaire's "Mirabeau Bridge" is as miraculous in its poise and fragility as the original. There is a deftly funny poem called "A Fable," which is a blithe commentary on American foreign policy, and a beautiful elegy for Auden. Again and again these poems take away the breath by the stunning aptness of simile or metaphor, and almost always of something in motion:

> Still, nothing changes as her perfect feet
> Click down the walk that issues in the street,
> Leaving the stations of her body there
> As a whip maps the countries of the air.

AND IN "Trolling for Blues" Wilbur returns to the subject of "An Event," the problem of capturing in words or in the mind some fleeting hint of what is called "reality." This topic is also the focus of one of the very best, wittiest, and most thoughtful poems in the new groups, "All That Is." The poem begins with the mootness and growing obscurity of dusk, beautifully described, and with the uncertainty that this blurred hour engenders. As the night darkens the stars come out and we follow "a many-lighted bus" making its way through a city, and a passenger who has turned to the crossword puzzle, as have, at that hour, many others in the kitchens and parlors of their homes.

And somehow, strangely, suddenly, the poet invites us to raise our eyes above these heads bent over their puzzles to behold "a ghostly grille / Through which, as often, we begin to see / The confluence of the Oka and the Aare." We have moved wonderfully into a region of some obscurity, partly because of the approaching night, and partly because the language of crossword puzzles has, as it were, taken over. That grille we have focused upon is partly perhaps the gridwork of a celestial map, but much more surely the checkerboard of squares of a typical crossword puzzle in which we might find that two rivers, the Oka and the Aare, which in prosy geographical fact are located in Russia and Switzerland, can nevertheless form a confluence where their letters intersect. Their very names, perhaps, produce in the poet a kind of crossword reverie of exotic words, in which he giddily proceeds to indulge:

> Is it a vision? Does the eye make out
> A flight of ernes, rising from aits or aeries,
> Whose shadows track across a harsh terrain
> Of esker and arête? At waterside,
> Does the shocked eeler lay his congers by,
> Sighting a Reo driven by an edile?
> And does the edile, from his running-board,
> Step down to meet a ranee? Does she end
> By reading to him from the works of Elia?

This charming fantasia of unanswered questions, this visionary excursion into the realm of the linguistically obscure, is not, in my view, the sort of text for which notes ought to be supplied or demanded. If it sends you, as it sent me, to the dictionary, and even to the Britannica, that is merely to acknowledge that the poet's mental life has gone off on a delightful toot of its own, and that we should take a puzzler's pleasure in tracking it down, just as he has attempted to trace, "Between the street-lamps and the jotted sky," a grille of crosswords that will resolve everything. There follows a passage I have not yet unravelled, in which the poet presents us with a vision of "A lambent god reposing on the sea, / Full of the knitted light of all that is." And he continues:

> It is a puzzle which, as puzzles do,
> Dreams that there is no puzzle. It is a rite
> Of finitude, a picture in whose frame
> Roc, oast, and Inca decompose at once
> Into the ABCs of every day.
> A door is rattled shut, a deadbolt thrown.
> Under some clipped euonymus, a mushroom,
> Bred of an old and deep mycelium
> As hidden as the webwork of the world,
> Strews on the shifty night-wind, rising now,
> A cast of spores as many as the stars.

WITTY AND COMPLEX and lovely as this poem may be, I nevertheless feel that another blank verse poem of meditation, titled "Lying," is, at least in my present view of things, the best poem in the collection. It begins with distinct modesty this way:

> To claim, at a dead party, to have spotted a grackle,
> When in fact you haven't of late, can do no harm.
> Your reputation for saying things of interest
> Will not be marred, if you hasten to other topics,
> Nor will the delicate web of human trust
> Be ruptured by that airy fabrication.

The poem then goes on to speculate about what it is that prompts us to these little acts of mendacity. Perhaps, initially, an impatience or boredom with the dailiness, the sheer routine, of things, and even with the more miraculous of things, "the horse's neck / Clothed with its usual thunder," in an echo of the majestic words of God in the 39th chapter of the Book of Job. That biblical catalog of divine wonders is always before us, as are other, still more uncommon, wonders, "And so with that most rare conception, nothing."

Since evil is only the absence of good, and since Satan is the Prince of Lies, he makes his sinuous entrance into the poem with almost unperceived skill, as "the water of a dried-up well / Gone to assail the cliffs of Labrador." He then approaches us, "pretending not to be," and appears, in the words of Milton from the ninth book of *Paradise Lost*, as a "*black mist low creeping*," which, when it rises, turns to a rainbow. But perhaps because of the invocation of Milton, the poem now finds itself confronting the axiom that art itself is a lie of sorts, and, in the words of Shakespeare's Touchstone, "The truest poetry is the most feigning." All of it is, according to Aristotle, a form of imitation, which is a kind of lie. Wilbur continues:

> Closer to making than the deftest fraud
> Is seeing how the catbird's tail was made
> To counterpoise, on the mock-orange spray,
> Its light, up-tilted spine; or, lighter still,
> How the shucked tunic of an onion, brushed
> To one side on a backlit chopping-board
> And rocked by trifling currents, prints and prints
> Its bright, ribbed shadows like a flapping sail.
> Odd that a thing is most itself when likened: . . .

And now we have come to the very heart of metaphor itself. It is metaphor that allows us to contemplate a great deal that might otherwise be intolerable, and, like tragedy, it "Finds pleasure in the cruellest simile." We return to the catbird, which, like a mockingbird, or a poet, is distinguished as a mimic, gifted in the art of imitation. The bird's song is characterized as "a chant / Of the first springs," and as a "tributary / To the great lies told with the eyes half-shut /

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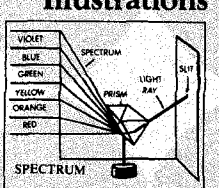

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That have the truth in view: . . ." There follow three such lies, all of them masterpieces of the imagination. The first is the pagan tale of Chiron, who "Instructed brute Achilles in the lyre," another of Wilbur's serious puns. The second is the biblical image of faultless Eden, and the third the concluding sacrifice and valor of Roland:

> who to Charles his king
> And to the dove that hatched the dove-tailed world
> Was faithful unto death, and shamed the Devil.

There is nobility in such utterance that is deeply persuasive, and throughout Wilbur's poetry we are accustomed to finding this rare quality, usually joined to wit, good humor, grace, modesty, and a kind of physical zest or athletic dexterity that is, so far as I know, unrivaled.

GOING NATIVE

The Power Game: How Washington Works by Hedrick Smith

(Random House, 793 pp., $22.50)

When Hedrick Smith published *The Russians* in 1976, it was a revelation. Here was a reporter for the *New York Times* who was actually talking to real people, not just to party apparatchiks. Smith gathered every scrap of information from his time in Moscow and wove it into an almost anthropological study of how the Russian people live. The premise of *The Power Game* is that Washington, D.C., too, is a foreign country. It's not an original notion, but it's still a useful one. Reporters and scholars too often fail to understand that official Washington is a peculiar, almost exotic culture, with its own folkways, and with often nonsensical patterns of behavior.

This time the problem is that Smith isn't Margaret Mead, he's a Samoan who thinks he's Margaret Mead. He's a native writing about his own kind. Some natives possess the detachment necessary to compensate for this, of course; but Smith is not among them. And no detachment means no depth perception, or very little sense of what's really important. So at 793 pages, the book becomes more encyclopedic than anthropological: a helpful reference book on the Reagan years that leaves no bigger footprints.

If *The Power Game* were a piece of legislation, it would be an omnibus pork barrel bill: nearly every important policymaker in town gets his own little reputation-construction project (usually in the form of a quote). If it were a dish, it would be a stew: some fresh spice, a lot of careful preparation, but the marbled beef has a chewed-over quality. And if it were a high school paper, the social studies teacher might write: "Hedrick, your research is strong, but you have not shown selectivity. Please avoid using every note card you gather. B."

I have to admit to being a little biased on the subject of Washington anthropology. My old boss Charles Peters wrote a book a few years ago called *How Washington Really Works* (the original subtitle of Smith's book, which Peters forced him to change). It was only around 100 pages, but it contained more original insights than Smith manages in seven times the space. Peters also covers more Washington institutions. Smith ignores the judiciary and the federal bureaucracy almost completely. The latter is a particularly serious omission, for it is the bureaucracy (as Smith understood in *The Russians*) that holds the key to understanding how a society is governed.

How did Smith manage to miss it? Perhaps because he accepted the idea that "governance" and "power" are separate concepts, separate things. Smith's idea of power is the kind he wrote about (before resigning recently) in the *New York Times*. Call it large-bore power. It involves clashes between the White House and Congress over tax and budget matters, military reform, video politics. Small-bore power—for instance, the way an agency chief goes on an end of the fiscal year spending spree so that his budget won't be cut—concerns him far less. Unfortunately, small-bore power is also what's less well known, and therefore more in need of explanation. We've already read a lot about Edwin Meese; we haven't read much about, say, the head of the Federal Aviation Administration. And this book doesn't remedy that. Washington figures of the Robert Strauss-Richard Darman-Christopher Matthews variety can go into a bookstore and find multiple references to themselves in the index. The FAA is not listed there at all. Nor is the Environmental Protection Agency, or the Department of Labor.

The reason is that while agencies like the FAA or OSHA may be essential to the well-being of the country, they are not particularly important in official Washington. Likewise, inside maneuvering that seems all-important in Washington often is irrelevant to everyone outside the Beltway. Instead of trying to define real power and influence as it affects real Americans—and to make judgments about the way such power is exercised—Smith is content to reflect on the self-referential world of this Beltway Washington. Thus even when he's telling us something new—say, narrating the story of the time James Baker almost became national security adviser—we don't learn whether it is significant in any larger sense. Power is accepted and defined in profoundly conventional terms.

That's not to say that Smith isn't attuned to nuances in the ways of the capital. His discussion, for instance, of "porcupine power" on Capitol Hill (as exemplified by obstructionists like Jesse Helms) is persuasive. And within the narrow constraints of his definition of power, he's good at the old Washington game of who has it and who doesn't. Again, the insights (that staff people, for example, have a lot of authority) are ordinary, but some of the details will be familiar only to people who peruse publications like the *National Journal* or *Congressional Quarterly*. Readers meet people like Steve Bell, staff director of the Senate Budget Committee, who originated the significant but little understood idea of budget "reconciliation," and Anthony Battista, a congressional staffer with considerable clout in military affairs. They are worth knowing.

Smith's prodigious reporting turns up many new details about old stories. As far as I know, no one had yet reported, for instance, that negotiations over tax reform grew so traumatic at one point that Dan Rostenkowski, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, broke into tears. But the bulk of the book remains a series of summaries of

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detailed work done by other journalists. Smith did not crib from, say, Elizabeth Drew on PACs, Gregg Easterbrook on the Divad gun, or Martin Schram on TV visuals. But he did do a lot of rereporting of already-told tales, often merely larding them with unnecessary quotes. (Do we really need to hear from Norman J. Ornstein that "historically, Congress was certainly an accomplice in creating deficits—but presidents were the masterminds"?)

There are advantages, of course, to replowing familiar ground. Even obvious facts can be hard for busy people to remember, and Smith manages to get most of the major events of the Reagan administration into a readable narrative. For anyone who may have missed those *New York Times* "Week In Review" pieces (more people than would care to admit it), *The Power Game* can be a useful primer. Michael Dukakis might want to take it to the beach during the transition.

BUT THAT is not the same thing as a coherent analysis of Washington. Newspapers are the forum for writers to survey powerful people, as Smith does, on what constitutes power (although those people may be the last ones to be able to analyze themselves). Books, on the other hand, are supposed to be for evaluating whether all those quotes that all those newspaper reporters gather make any sense. Power for what? To what end, exactly? Smith does this only at the very end, in a cursory way. The rest of the book contains analysis, but usually of the most pallid sort. It's not enough, in a chapter on lobbying, to say that Robert Beckel, Walter Mondale's former campaign manager, now lobbies for causes at odds with those he fought for during the campaign. We need to know whether Smith thinks that's acceptable or not. Judgments, in other words. Even moral judgments. Reporting, after all, does not speak for itself, even if it comes with an anthropological gloss.

There are two possible explanations for the absence of such judgments from *The Power Game*. The first is that Smith is not capable of them. I don't believe that. I think instead that he so thoroughly believes in the culture he attempts to explain that real judgments about it become impossible. Like many journalists, and many of the politicians treated in this book, Smith has become obsessed with "process." He recognizes this, and most of his analysis is devoted to it. The title and chapter heads use the word

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"game." What he doesn't seem to recognize is that the framework he imposes on Washington is a part of what ails it. And his list of recommendations suggests even more emphasis on process (for example, through the return of party pros), as if results and process amount to the same thing. But they don't, and they shouldn't. Just because the people in this book think Washington is one big game doesn't mean that Hedrick Smith (and the rest of us) have to think so too.

JONATHAN ALTER

Jonathan Alter is a senior writer at *Newsweek*.

GRAND ILLUSIONS

Is Socialism Doomed? The Meaning of Mitterrand by Daniel Singer

(Oxford University Press, 324 pp., $24.95)

Hope springs eternal. Twenty years ago, in *Prelude to Revolution*, Daniel Singer, a British journalist who has spent much time in France and now writes for the *Nation*, persuaded himself that the failure of the student uprising in May 1968, and of the massive social movement that followed it, was no reason for discouragement. The events had nonetheless shown the possibility of a revolution in advanced capitalist societies. Now, in *Is Socialism Doomed?*, he concludes his incisive analysis of the failure of the French Socialist government of 1981-86 with another message of hope. It wasn't socialism that failed, because it wasn't even attempted. The fiasco confirmed only the bankruptcy of social democracy.

Singer's book is both a critical review of the French Socialists' performance and a jeremiad. The review is sharp, but unoriginal. By now there are probably more post-mortems, in French and in English, than the acts of the Mauroy and Fabius governments under Mitterrand's presidency deserve. The jeremiad, by contrast, is both interesting and exasperating. It confirms that there exist, in politics, not four, but five temperaments. We all know of the conservative, the reactionary, the reformist, and the revolutionary. But we must never confuse the last with the utopian, who dreams of revolution—of a total break with the present—but never comes down from the clouds.

Singer dislikes capitalism, the costs it imposes on workers and the poor, the enslavement of human beings to the cash nexus, the recurrent mass unemployment required by the business cycle, the commercialization of culture, the domination by the United States. Socialism, to him, would bring an end to all of this. It would entail a combination of central planning and *autogestion*, the extension of democracy way beyond the sphere of political elections—"the active participation of the people in their factories and their offices"; the collective ownership, by the people, of the means of production; the abolition of class society, of the exploitation of women, and of the cult of economic growth at the expense of the environment. *Vaste programme*, as de Gaulle would have said. It is even more daunting when one realizes, as does Singer (to his credit), that such socialism in one country won't do, that "a medium-size nation-state ... offers ... at best a provisional platform," and that socialism "is condemned to internationalism here and now," that is, to a united socialist Western Europe and to concerted action against the exploitation of the Third World.

How is this grandiose vision to be carried out? Not in the communist manner. Singer, who is contemptuous of the sudden discovery of the evils of Soviet totalitarianism by the French *nouveaux philosophes* after 1975, is equally critical of the failure of the Western European Communist Parties to replace, in their vision, the "Soviet system of rule from above" with a new concept of democracy from below. He is particularly angry with the French Communist Party for its failure to repudiate the Stalinist image, as the Italian Communists have done. But neither can Singer's vision be carried out in the social democratic way. Social democracy, in Singer's analysis (as well as in the rhetoric of Mitterrand's party, circa 1981), is bad, because it seeks social progress without economic rupture, it accepts the domestic and international constraints of capitalism, it locks itself into the parliamentary prison and thus dooms itself to impotence, since it refuses to mobilize and organize the masses. It is a formula for surrender.

Singer's problem, then, is precisely the problem that Mitterrand (who had, before 1981, written equally acid comments about social democracy), along with those of his Socialist colleagues who wanted to go beyond mere reform, faced when the Union of the Left came to power. Is there a third way? Conceptually, perhaps; but Singer never discusses the difficult problem of making central planning compatible with the extreme decentralization that self-management of the workplace would entail, nor does he address the multiple ambiguities of public ownership of the means of production. He also passes much too quickly over the contradiction between a temporary phase of protectionism (aimed at sheltering the nation from outside capitalist pressures) and the necessary spread of socialism throughout Western Europe.

The main issue, however, is not conceptual, but political. How can one, without resorting to totalitarian methods, impose a vision on a people whose vast majority does not accept it, because that citizenry is composed of a mix of racists, conservatives, social democrats, and Communists? Singer writes that the chief reason for the "ideological shift" of the government of the left in 1982-83—the switch from Keynesianism, nationalizations, and reform to fiscal stringency, austerity, and the rehabilitation of private enterprise and profit—was "a double failure of the labor movement: its incapacity in the 1960s to seek solutions beyond the confines of existing society, and its inability in the 1980s to carry out a progressive policy within the framework of a capitalist society in crisis." But the labor movement, in France, is both weak and divided. It is surely not a force on which a revolutionary government can lean.

Singer is equally hard on the so-called "second left" of Michel Rocard and of Edmond Maire, the leader of the labor union that was closest to the Socialists, the CFDT, because these champions of *autogestion* did not repudiate the market and the private sector, did not tackle "the problem of power within society at

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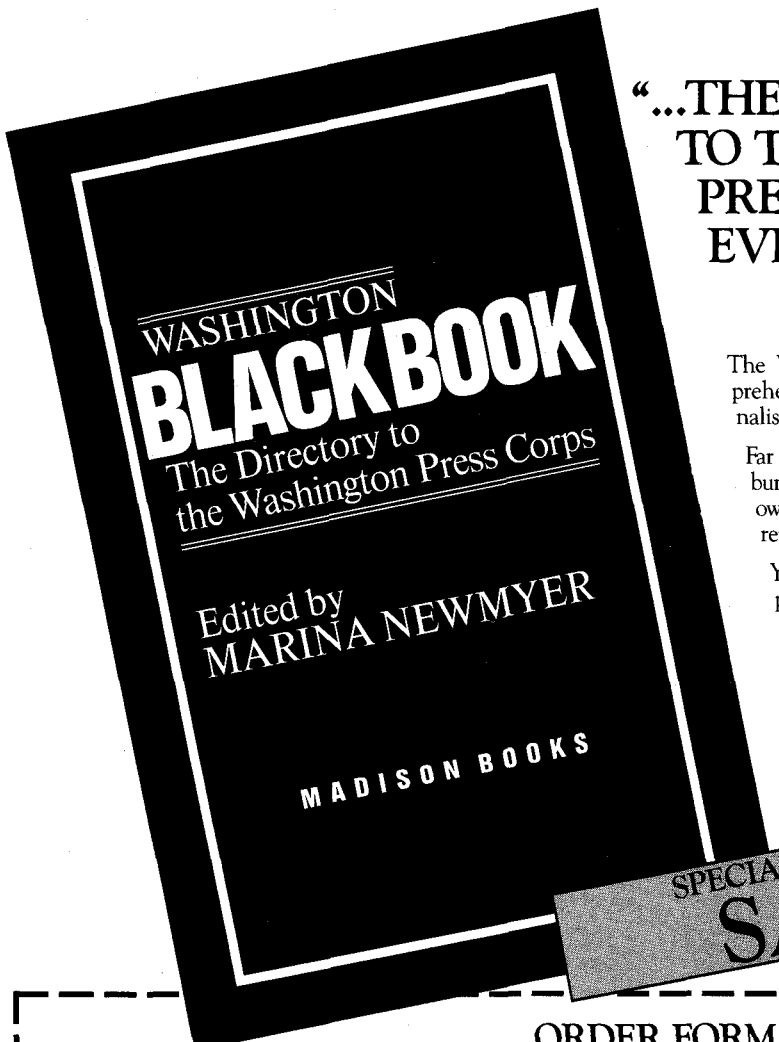

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large," and did not want the left to "radicalize its means" in order to achieve its ends. Clearly, then, Singer's revolution never had a chance with Communists and social democrats. But a revolution without a solid mass of revolutionaries behind it can be either a fiasco or another totalitarian experiment aimed at making people free against their will. And a revolution that must lead to "non-alignment, to a Socialist third force, on a European scale to begin with" is going to have trouble spreading to neighbors that are resolutely aligned and are either conservative or social democratic.

THE ALTERNATIVE policy that Singer would have liked Mitterrand to choose in March 1983 required a withdrawal of France from the European Monetary System and protectionist measures aimed at lowering the flood of imports provoked by the rise of purchasing power in 1981-82. But the men who argued for such a course, the businessman Jean Riboud and the Socialist politicians Pierre Bérégovoy and (at first) Laurent Fabius, were in no way the champions of Singer's brand of socialism. Moreover, such a policy would have been economically dangerous and politically disastrous.

As Peter Hall has observed in *The Mitterrand Experiment*, these moves "might well have intensified pressure against the franc, eliminated several sources of foreign exchange, and necessitated an even greater austerity." They would have "represented a radical step away from the pan-European strategy on which France's economic success since World War II had been based," gravely threatened French exports, entailed even more deflation than the policy that was chosen, and marked a shift in the direction ardently desired by the Communist Party, which would have ceased to be just a minor partner in the coalition. A rupture indeed, but one that would have gone against the wishes of the majority of the French, polarized the electorate far more than the course followed in 1983-85, and not led in any obvious fashion to the socialist future so dear to Singer.

Once again, Singer is torn between his forlorn lucidity and his utopian hope. The man who understands that the decline of the Communist Party "helped to discredit a radical alternative" and to hasten France's "resigned acceptance of the permanence of the capitalist system" manages to see in the demonstrations of high school and university students in December 1986 (whose effect was to consolidate the disastrous status quo of French higher education), and in the very corporatist railway workers' strike that followed, a reason to believe that history does not end with capitalism.

Singer's book appears at a moment that can only strengthen his conviction that Mitterrand was never a serious Socialist. The foxy old leader is running for re-election as the protector of national unity against political factions, as the man who has accepted the institutions created by de Gaulle but redressed their balance by granting greater leeway to the prime minister, as the defender of past "social conquests" (but not the champion of new ones), as a foe of "money," whose mission it is, nevertheless, to adapt France to the complete (capitalist) Common Market of 1992. The word "socialism" doesn't even appear, and the Socialists themselves assure the electorate that they have learned the lesson of moderation, fiscal responsibility, and sound economic management.

If Mitterrand is re-elected, the government is likely to be either a coalition of Socialists and quite conservative members of the center (should the latter decide to switch their allegiance in light of the electoral results) or another government of the right, should Mitterrand fail to gain a majority in the present National Assembly, dissolve it, and be faced with another legislature dominated by the right. The latter may well happen, given the abandonment of proportional representation and the return to the electoral system that prevailed throughout most of the Fifth Republic. But this evolution does more than vindicate Singer's sarcasms. It also confirms the obvious: that France is not now, and indeed was not in 1981, in a revolutionary mood, that its future lies in a tight association with neighboring countries where the disembodied, if generous, utopia of Daniel Singer has just as little of a chance of ever becoming a reality.

STANLEY HOFFMANN

Stanley Hoffmann, Douglas Dillon Professor of the Civilization of France at Harvard, is the co-author, with George Ross and Sylvia Malzacher, of *The Mitterrand Experiment* (Polity).

NEWS FROM THE NORSE

The Greenlanders by Jane Smiley

(Knopf, 558 pp., $19.95)

In Jane Smiley's recent novella, *The Age of Grief*, a dentist speaks with the patterned incoherence that marks the voice of truly contemporary fiction. He says, "Teeth are important. Eskimo cultures used to abandon their old folks in the snow when their teeth went, no matter how good their health was otherwise. People in our culture have a lot of privileges. One of them is having no teeth." In which culture—the one where loss of teeth is fatal or the one where it is a privilege—would a dentist be more important? For *The Age of Grief*'s narrator, that compact allusion to Eskimos is the relic of a world almost inconceivably more arduous than his own privileged life.

Most of us possess similar mental relics, reminders of the harshness of existence in another time or another place. I know one person who asks a single question about friends' pregnancies: Would you have died giving birth on the frontier? The vulgar moral of history is that people in our culture have a lot of privileges. That may be why historical fiction tends to be pulp fiction these days: it reeks of that complacent moral, according to which hardship is just the necessary foil to romance. Even serious historical fiction seldom has the pungency of novels set in the present, offering an elaborate temporal illusion and the reprise of familiar conventions instead of the news we badly want to hear.

Smiley's new book, *The Greenlanders*, is a wonderful exception, a historical novel with the nearness of contemporary fiction. It is a sobering work set in 14th-century Greenland—barely within the

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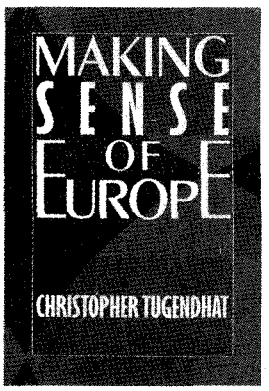

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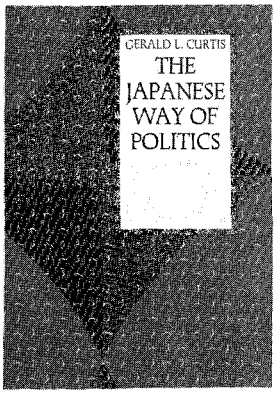

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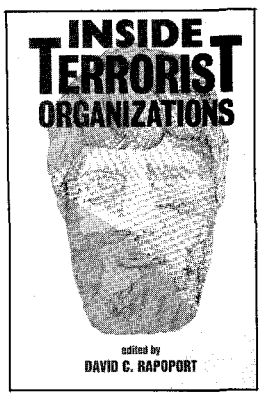

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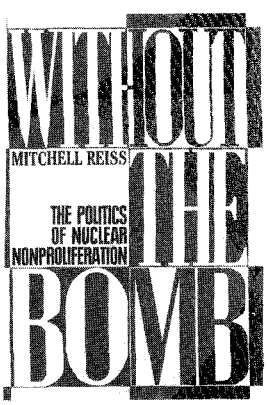

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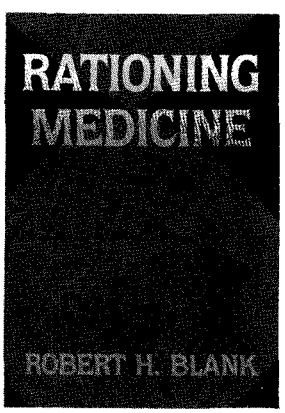

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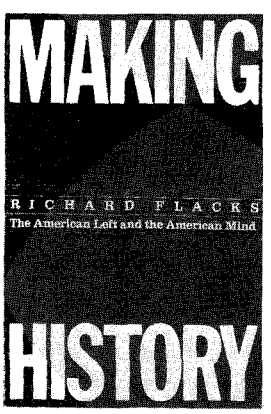

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confines of European culture—and closely based on what is known of life in the remnant of the colony established there by Erik the Red, who was exiled from Iceland in the tenth century. The Church survives among Smiley's Greenlanders, as do ecclesiastical and secular law; those artifacts and their workings we can imagine, but who can imagine the country? Greenland is bare of everything but difficulty. And yet, as the gentle Norwegian priest Sira Pall Hallvardsson says, "These Greenlanders declare it a fresh and lovely spot, in the way that all men look about themselves at the earth and think themselves at home."

THE GREENLANDERS is a chronicle of events occurring within the lifespan of Gunnar Asgeirsson, who was born in 1352. The 190 inhabitants of Greenland's Eastern Settlement (a Western Settlement has already perished) live on farms, or steadings, widely separated by fjords and low mountains on the island's southern tip. Their sustenance is sheep, cows, goats, reindeer, ptarmigan, hares, fish, seals, stranded whales, and the few herbs that flourish in summer. They have no bread and little wood.

A history of Greenland, extracted from this chronicle, would read: Greenland once lay on the shores of Paradise, but now floats far out on the western ocean, where everything is diminished. Once Greenland men were voyagers and great hunters, ranging the north for walrus, bears, and narwhal. But now "the seas get more treacherous every year" and the hunting grounds have fallen to the Eskimos, or skraelings, widely regarded as devils. The priests at Gardar, the bishop's seat, feel the Lord's retreat, and Gunnar's wife, Birgitta Lavransdottir, says, "It seems to me that we have come to the ending of the world." Birgitta is right. The nomadic skraelings continued to prosper, but Greenlanders were extinct by the close of the 15th century.

When serious historical novels fail, they usually do so through anxiety of evidence: they tell the joke and have to explain the punch line too. Unlike fictions about the way we live now, they cannot rely on what the reader knows, for the reader rarely knows enough (and sometimes—worse—knows too much). Their rhetoric is not that of persuasive storytelling but of overpleading, so we end by crediting the research, not the characters, the setting and not the plot. Here again, Smiley's novel is a brilliant exception. Of a fellow priest, Sira Pall observes that his impatience lies hidden in the " 'ironia' typical of the Greenlanders." "Ironia" is the mode of this book. It convinces by explaining nothing.

Smiley's narrative manner is an expansive imitation of the terse Norse sagas. Near the end of the book we learn that this work was written by Gunnar Asgeirsson, who meant to let "all the folk of the world . . . learn what is really the case with us." Gunnar is proud and intelligent, one of perhaps three literate men in the Eastern Settlement, but he has never been to the world. His voice remains dissolved within the community of Greenlanders; though he is a storyteller within the story, his tales know no first person. He assumes that the reader lives as he does, though in less isolation. He does not explain how women make cheeses or how men flense a beached whale or why cows are walled in at the onset of winter, because all people who are not skraelings make cheeses, flense whales, and wall cows into byres when the snow comes. What we will need to know, Gunnar assumes, is the nature of Greenlanders. And he is right. This is the news we want to hear.

THE GREENLANDERS has a profusion of plots broken into tiny narrative units. As the narrative advances, the plots begin to cohere the way stories told about any small community do. Some lives arch across the whole of the novel, notably those of Sira Pall and Gunnar's son, Kollgrim, and Gunnar's older sister Margret. After her illicit lover, Skuli Gudmundsson, is killed in a rightful action by Gunnar and her husband, Olaf, Margret leads an existence of astonishing severity, outcast at first, then wandering as a servant from steading to steading. The stillness of her life alarms even Greenlanders. Reconciled as an old woman to her brother, she says:

> It has always seemed to me that I seek to be as a stone, and when I was a young woman, it seemed to me that such was the progress toward death—a hardening that would come over the flesh bit by bit, until the corpus lay there in the bedcloset, or was thrown out into the snow to await burial in the spring. Now it seems to me that the flesh quivers with still more life in every year, and that I will never achieve what I seek. I fear, indeed, that death is not death, but life everlasting after all.

There is assuredly something stonelike but quivering in the character of these Greenlanders. The bitterness of the land forces them into narrow paths, and their hold on life is stubborn. Self-irony afflicts even their spiritual teachers. Sira Pall remarks that the Greenlanders "are like horses who come when they are called because such peculiar noises arouse their curiosity, although the farmer esteems himself for the success of his training." They have learned that "whatever will happen will be good enough," and that there is no reason to complain if "the winter was no colder than previous ones, Lent no longer, and Easter no warmer." This sustains them when sand drifts over the fields or starvation visits. It allows them to face equably the sure extinction of their race.

The Greenlanders is a grim book, and yet in its austerity and the caliber of its art it is jubilant, its effect that of a prayer composed by one of the priests at Gardar:

> Lord, we lie in our turf houses,
> As in graves covered with snow,
> And our prayers rise to you as loudly
> As the voices of the dead.
> Lord, You break the ice for us,
> And call forth the green grass,
> And so we rise out of our houses
> And come forth singing.

When this was first read to the congregation, "only a few praised it," because it was too true, but it resonates in the reader's mind. In *The Greenlanders*, singing is the sound you hear above the wind.

SMILEY'S greatest achievement is not the accuracy of her research, the vividness of her characters, or the simple abundance of her story. It is the uncanny movement of the narrative, which radiates a spirit of acceptance. This is partly a philosophical matter (clearly, the Greenlanders are stoic) and partly a technical matter. Contemporary fiction often moves like a man tripping: it loses its balance and stumbles forward, tumbling into cumulative order. But from the moment *The Greenlanders* begins ("Asgeir Gunnarson farmed at Gunnars Stead . . .") until it ends ("And the children peeped out of the bedcloset, and Gunnar told his tale"), the narrative is perfectly balanced, never cascading forward or backward, at ease with the way first one thing and then another thing happens in the lives of these extraordinary people.

This grace arises from the stern resignation—reflected in the storytelling—one feels in the speech and conduct of the Greenlanders. Their deliberate acquiescence to the condition they inhabit is itself ironic. Sira Pall, for instance, prays

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by saying, "Our Lord, this is I, Pall Hallvardsson, far out on the western ocean. I am the priest in this place who thinks well of You." Resignation is never more evident than when it cracks, as it does when Margret, who normally dresses in a conservative purplish wool characteristic of her family's steading, wears a gown of red silk to meet her lover, Skuli. "She saw his jaw drop and his eyes widen into perfect admiration and surprise, such as she had never seen on his or any face before in her life." Margret discovers that when the patient, unsurprised "carapace of self" shatters, sin and vanity result. She sees "that this is how it is that folk are made to desire what they know they should not have, they are made to wait for it, so that when it comes, no matter how dark and full of sin and repellent it is, they are glad enough to welcome it."

The Greenlanders portrays the hard place, the harsh relic of being where tradition is fragile and civilization no more durable than winter hay. The reader encounters so much truth in this novel that Sira Pall's analogy between the Greenlanders and all men seems not trite but inevitable. When the book ends, one remembers well the lives of Gunnar and Margret and Kollgrim, but one remembers most of all Sira Pall's (and Smiley's) compassion for the stonelike souls in his cure, souls that can barely be readied for heaven so resolute is their elemental grasp on existence. "In the darkness of his chamber, when the seal oil lamp had gone out," Sira Pall sits and wonders:

> How was it . . . that the Lord gathered these folk together in one spot for only a long enough moment so that they came to love and depend on one another, and then wrested them apart for eternity, some to perdition, some to Heaven, some to bide their time in purgatory? And how could it be that the soul should endure perpetual separation, when even the little separations between deaths were hardly bearable?

VERLYN KLINKENBORG

Verlyn Klinkenborg is the author of *Making Hay* (Vintage).

UNHAPPILY EVER AFTER

The Fifth Child
by Doris Lessing

(Knopf, 133 pp., $16.95)

Out of the Whirlpool
by Alan Sillitoe

(Harper & Row, 122 pp., $11.95)

The baby who is cursed in its cradle and the pauper who is transformed into a prince have a legendary allure. The infant speaks to our worst fears—that life will take a horrible turn and deliver an unlucky creature instead of an innocent newborn. The rags-to-riches story is the fulfillment of the universal dream of miraculous elevation. The stories spin out opposite fates—and they inevitably raise the question of whether fate alone is involved. Is it simply luck, or is justice perhaps at work in distributing such radically different futures—the dark plunge and the golden rise?

In fairy tales there is usually an upbeat moral. In fact, the two stories often merge, blight turning into blessing. Sleeping Beauty, capriciously cursed at birth, is gloriously raised up in the end; Cinderella and Snow White, the spurned stepchildren, get their handsome princes—a reward for their virtue in adversity. Life, of course, is rarely so well shaped, but that need not detract from the power of the stories. If anything, it makes them more haunting, as both Doris Lessing and Alan Sillitoe appreciate. In *The Fifth Child* Lessing tells the unsettling tale of an ill-fated child and his family. *Out of the Whirlpool* is Sillitoe's version of the lucky pauper story. In keeping with the times and with the authors' long-standing interests, both novels raise questions about social rather than natural or divine justice.

The Fifth Child and *Out of the Whirlpool* are actually novellas, not much longer than 100 pages. The compression encourages the fablelike quality that both writers aim for. Lessing, who has recently returned to realism after excursions into science fiction in her *Canopus in Argos* series, here uses condensed, foreboding descriptions of domesticity to shift her story subtly into the realm of the strange. Sillitoe counts on clipped working-class argot and dreamlike juxtaposition of scenes to evoke a disorienting world in which circumstances and expectations are rarely aligned.

The ambience of the two books could hardly be less similar. Lessing's story takes place in a snug London suburb, Sillitoe's in his familiar gray northern England; she starts with a burgeoning family, he with a broken family. But their visions finally converge in an implicit critique of the condition of Britain, perhaps not surprising from two writers known for their left-leaning sympathies and their committed fiction. Far from predicting justice and happiness ever after, both see a society irremediably divided. Their novellas are not, however, pointed political allegories; Lessing and Sillitoe are clearly more interested in the mystery of fable, and their stories benefit from an unpolemical touch. They let the dark moral speak for itself: the poor remain poor, and the cursed are cast out.

The Fifth Child begins in sweetness and light. Once upon a time—in the late 1960s in London—Harriet Walker and David Lovatt, two old-fashioned souls out of sync with their era, met at an office party "and knew at once that this is what they had been waiting for." In the lilting cadence of a fairy tale, Lessing launches into the anachronistic story of the young couple's early years together. Harriet and David immediately decide to marry (a virgin until she met David, Harriet has no doubt that he is her ideal mate). Their life plans are equally clear: in defiance of the ethos of the day, David wants a house filled with children and a wife overseeing it, which is exactly what Harriet has set her sights on. Their fantasies quickly become fact. Four children follow one other in breathless succession. During holidays the rambling house they've bought outside London is filled with relatives and neighbors who are awed by the display of family "happiness, in the old style."

It's not exactly a fascinating story, as Lessing is well aware; there's irony in the patness of it all. And there's a dangerous

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smugness in the Lovatts' outlook that lends suspense:

> It had been hard preserving their belief in themselves when the spirit of the times, the greedy and selfish '60s, had been so ready to condemn them, to isolate, to diminish their best selves. And look, they had been right to insist on guarding that stubborn individuality of theirs, which had chosen, and so obstinately, the best—this.

Lessing leans on the conventions of fable. Such a swift ascent obviously foreshadows a downfall. She anticipates the questions soon to be raised by the Lovatts' misfortune, their fifth child. Not long before he's conceived, Harriet's unhappily married sister has a baby with Down's syndrome, and Harriet speculates that "their quarrelling . . . had probably attracted the mongol child." At the same time, Lessing's readers may begin to anticipate that they're in for too transparent a parable about our troubled times: there are ill omens on a larger scale as well. "There was an ugly edge on events: more and more it seemed that two peoples lived in England, not one—enemies, hating each other, who could not hear what the other said." The Lovatts reluctantly tune in to the dismal news: "At least they ought to know what went on outside their fortress, their kingdom. . . ."

But in exploring this kingdom's collapse, Lessing skirts any formulaic message. Her story straddles the line between straight realism and science fiction, and certainties dissolve into questions. Pregnant again, Harriet knows early on that something is very different, and wrong, this time. She's battered by violent, inhuman writhings of the creature within. Is it just a difficult pregnancy, as the doctors say, or a demonic one? Is the creature, named Ben, a "normal healthy fine baby," as the hospital says of the alien-looking child, or a "Neanderthal baby," as his mother judges?

A larger question lurks behind all the others: Have the Lovatts—so complacent in their capacity to love and nurture—in some way "attracted" this cold-eyed child, who becomes increasingly monstrous and unlovable? Lessing's story suggests one possible reading: that the Lovatts' rejection of the public tumult of the '60s in favor of their own private peace—what they consider their "best selves"—is the more "selfish and greedy" response. The danger of retreat was a subject she addressed in *Retreat to Innocence*, a novel published and set in the '50s, featuring an apolitical heroine eager "to get married young and have four children and no war, and to be happy. That's all." Lessing judged the book a failure and has never reprinted it, explaining that "it was a wonderful theme, but I did not do it justice." This time, transporting the theme to the '70s, she aims to do it justice by doing it lightly. She doesn't preach for or against engagement, she simply subjects the Lovatts to the trial of a freakish fifth child who destroys the peace.

The only moral is an ambiguous one—that adversity opens the eyes of the privileged to a world beyond their own, but enlightenment is hardly salvation. Ben's fate—first a stint in a mental hospital, then membership in the underclass, a violent life among "the uneducable, the unassimilable, the hopeless"—confronts the Lovatts with a social abyss they'd hoped to ignore. But *The Fifth Child* suggests that there is nothing to be done to address it. The book offers a thoroughly disillusioned vision of social possibilities, which Lessing has Harriet frame in shockingly reactionary terms: Ben, she speculates, must be a member of a throwback race destined to occupy the desolate corners of the world. As social analysis, it's likely to strike most as objectionable. But as social metaphor, it's all too powerful. The pessimism of Lessing's fable lies in its uncomfortable merging of the

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Since 1965, Dr. Helmut Schoeck has been professor and the director of the Institute of Sociology at the University of Mainz.

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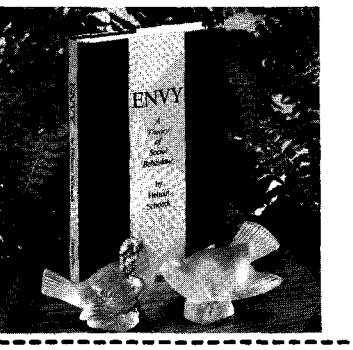

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inadmissible and the true, the nightmarish and the real.

AT FIRST Alan Sillitoe's novella looks like the optimistic tale of social intermingling that *The Fifth Child* isn't. Where Ben Lovatt falls from upper-middle-class familial comfort into the depths of delinquency, 18-year-old Peter Granby rises from a rough, low life to be the live-in employee, and eventually the lover, of a well-to-do older woman named Eileen Farnsfield. Peter's character is straight out of the storybooks: he is the poetic poor boy who retains a sense of dignity amid degradation. And his deliverance is as fairy-tale-like as Ben's damnation. One day he kindly tends to an old lady who collapses dead on the street in front of the furniture factory where he works. Her daughter, attractive and divorced, comes to thank him (he's mortified by the attention) and urges him to turn to her if he's ever in need. It just so happens that Peter soon is, for suddenly he finds himself truly down on his luck; he's been thrown out of his house and mugged as he wanders the dingy city streets in search of a place to sleep.

This plot too verges on cliché, and though Sillitoe's irony is harder to gauge than Lessing's, it seems clear that a degree of incredulous distance is what he intends; this is the fantastic scene-setting required to stage the test he's interested in. The experiment is familiar from *The Fifth Child*: What happens when the classes unexpectedly and intimately mix? Sillitoe looks at the results from the bottom up—takes the Ben's-eye view, so to speak. In an essay entitled "Poor People" in 1964, Sillitoe preached passionately about the view from below:

> The poor know of only two classes in society. Their sociology is much simplified. There are *them* and *us*. Them are those who tell you what to do, who drive a car, use a different accent, are buying a house in another district, deal in cheques and not money, pay your wages, collect rent and telly dues . . . can't look you in the eye, read the news on wireless or television, hand you the dole or national assistance money. . . . Them are those who robbed you of your innocence, live on your backs, buy the house from over your head, eat you up or tread you down.

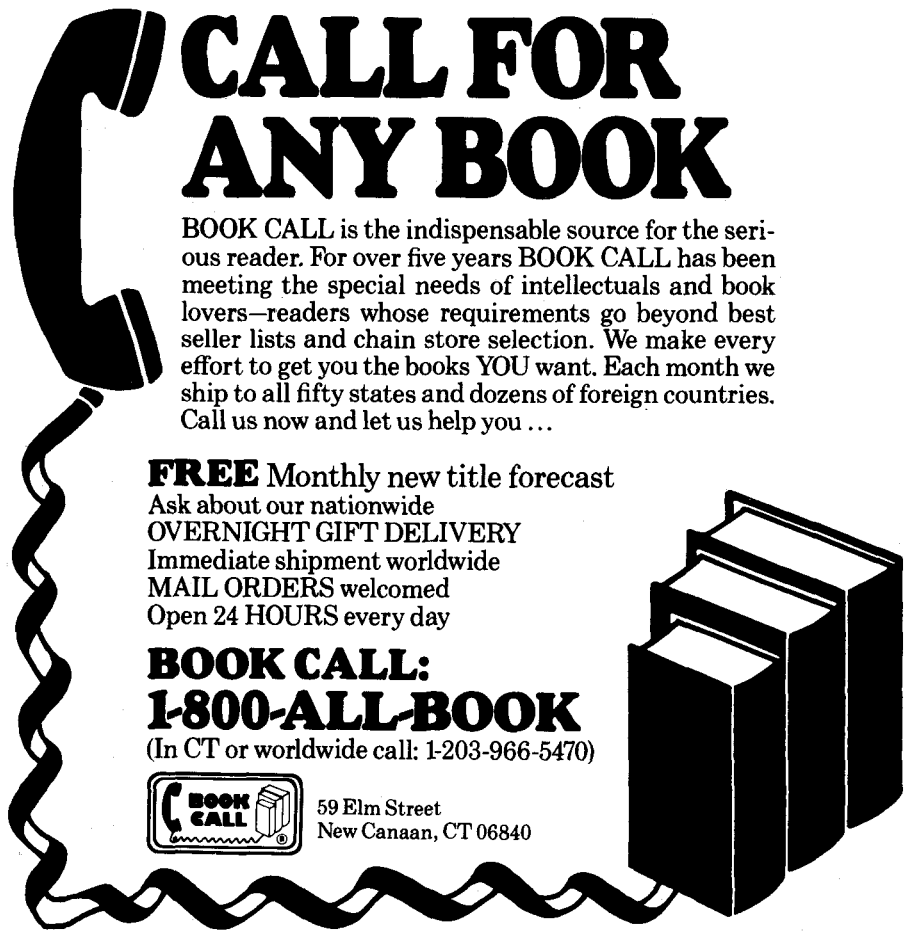
A quarter century later Sillitoe is probing the possibility of a more complicated sociology, as Peter finds himself in a house in another district, learns how to drive Eileen's car, gets a checkbook, uses a different accent (and titillates Eileen by using his own, "You are my owd duck, aren't yer?"), becomes the superintendent of her rental bungalows on the coast, looks her in the eye and sees her look back. Peter is exhilarated: "He had been spared from reform school for another sight of the flat blue sea, this time from behind the wheel of a car with a well-dressed woman beside him." But he's also confused—"the old world had been pulled out of his reach"—and restive with a sense that something in the new world is still out of reach. "He had a chequebook and driving licence, and he was able to vote. He had a job of a kind, and a hutch to sleep in, but what he wanted was beyond either knowing or getting."

Luxury, like adversity, opens one's eyes to another world—but Sillitoe, like Lessing, doesn't set much store by enlightenment. As his story winds to its end—which is as stagy as the opening—it looks as though the old, harsh moral still holds: Eileen, it turns out, has robbed him of his innocence, eaten him up, trod him down. When he discovers her sleeping with her accountant, Peter loses control (an ancient gun has been lurking in the background from the beginning), and the damage is dramatically symbolic. He fires the gun at the ceiling to scare them, and it backfires, blinding him. Eileen abandons him, and the world has closed in again—the distance between us and them yawns once more.

Sillitoe treats the conclusion as comic, not tragic: order, it seems, has been restored, clarity has replaced confusion. Surmounting his bitterness, Peter optimistically hopes for love and life with a lower-class nurse named Violet. The poetic last paragraphs imply that he's more at liberty in his own small space than he was amid the freedom of affluence:

> There was a garden at the back, and his boots went into the hard and crusty snow. That was real. He could smell the cold, and taste the snow. Therefore, he could see it. The sound of his boots going into the snow was like walking on salt. Salt went as far as the walls, which weren't too far away. The clouds must be like mountains.
>
> "There aren't any clouds," Violet told him with a laugh. "The sky's blue. There was a hard frost last night."

But the lyricism is laced with irony. Shifting between the possible and the true, between dream and reality, Sillitoe's story is as bleak as the accompanying pen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and ink sketches by Peter Farmer.

These novellas share a surprising air of resignation in the face of the social chasms they evoke. The passionate, sometimes didactic tone of some of Sillitoe's and Lessing's previous work is gone, and the epic urge has subsided as they return to their initial strength, short fiction. Not that they've abandoned the credo Lessing rather grandly proclaimed many years ago in "A Small Personal Voice" (1957), a credo Sillitoe might well have endorsed:

> Artists are the traditional interpreters of dreams and nightmares, and this is no time to turn our backs on our chosen responsibilities, which is what we should be doing if we refused to share in the deep anxieties, terrors, and hopes of human beings everywhere.

In fact, these novellas address their authors' oldest preoccupations in one of the oldest forms. Putting the conventions of fable to good use, they ask questions about the ways we live happily, or unhappily, ever after.

ANN HULBERT

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CORRESPONDENCE, *from page 6*

expense for doctors and tests, but for this $27.30 is deducted monthly from the Social Security check. Besides, Medicare pays only for a "reasonable charge," often less than what the patient has to pay to the doctor, and then only 80 percent of the reasonable charge is paid; and $75 a year of self-participation is required. In order to be covered for these amounts, people must carry private insurance, called medigap, that costs about $80 a month. Even then medication, eyeglasses, and dental care are not covered as a rule. Statistics have shown that Medicare pays about 50 to 60 percent of the actual medical expense that a senior citizen might incur. To call this a national health insurance is, to express it mildly, an overstatement.

RUDOLPH DAVID
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

To the editors:

During the 1960s many folks aged 40-50-60 were disgusted with the younger generation. "Damn hippies think the world owes them a living . . ." In the 1980s these same folks, now "seniors," still despise that same younger generation: "Damn yuppies care only for money . . ." But now, of course, lots of seniors feel "We've paid our dues," and insist that the world really does owe them a living, plus medical care, discounts at the movies, free banking . . .

RALPH DIMEO JR.
South Orange, New Jersey

TRB, *from page 4*

limitations and loopholes were part of a tortuous compromise. Was that entire exercise unnecessary because an even broader law was already on the books? Martin Luther King and George Wallace, Hubert Humphrey and Strom Thurmond, would all have been very surprised to hear it.

Dissenting from last month's decision to reconsider the Court's 1976 ruling, Justice John Paul Stevens wrote that it was unfair "to recognize an equality right . . . and then to declare unceremoniously that perhaps we were wrong and had better reconsider our prior judgment." But in fact, Stevens thought the Court was wrong in 1976 as well. "For me," he wrote back then, "the problem . . . is whether to follow a line of authority which I firmly believe to have been incorrectly decided." The broad interpretation of the statute, he said, "would have amazed the legislators who voted for it." Nevertheless, he supported the "incorrect" interpretation because it "is now an important part of the fabric of our law."

With so many liberal doctrines now woven into "the fabric of our law," liberals like the idea that they should be preserved even if most justices think they are wrong. Conservatives complain that this notion turns the Supreme Court into a one-way legal ratchet: liberal majorities add new doctrines but conservative majorities can't subtract them. How much respect the Court should give its own past rulings is a perennial question that will be paramount in the coming years. Certainly, though, it represents an extreme approach for the Court to announce it has decided to reopen an old controversy when nobody has even asked it to do so.

Last month's (unsigned) majority opinion scolded the dissenters for seeming to argue that a broad interpretation of a civil rights law deserves special respect. The Court, it sermonized, must "treat all litigants equally," and it noted pompously that each justice takes an oath to "do equal right to the poor and to the rich." Since the majority's specific concern here is that the rights of the poor have been interpreted too broadly, this remark inevitably recalls Anatole France's famous crack about the law in its majesty forbidding rich and poor alike to sleep under bridges. Although the Court's conservative majority may well be correct in this particular case, the relish with which they take it up is unnerving.

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CAMBRIDGE DIARIST

Community and Charisma

"COMMUNITY" is one of the basic ideas of social thought, "the most fundamental and far-reaching," according to Robert Nisbet. With its rich resonances it is not merely a descriptive word. It also bestows legitimacy and suggests norms. And it is highly evocative, calling up images of intimacy and solidarity, commitment and continuity. At least these were the images the word used to evoke. But that was before our political vernacular appropriated the language of the profound in order to disguise its own lack of profundity. The word "community" as commonly used now means almost nothing. Some of today's alleged communities are simply oxymoronic. The "financial community," for example. Wall Streeters are more like a cohort of cutthroats lacking even one attribute associated with the idea of community. Another blithe semantic falsehood is the "intelligence community," and not just because it isn't all that intelligent. Or how about the "community of nations"? I don't for a moment think America has anything properly called a "Jewish community" (too ideologically fissured) or a "Hispanic community" (simply too diverse) or, still less, "the black community." Community implies both cohesion and purpose. A sense of difference or disadvantage is not enough. If our black population genuinely constituted a community we'd be far less anxious about its present and future health. One of the sad truths about America is that it is composed less and less of real communities and, therefore, it is always looking for someone with charisma and calling to save it.

COME TO THINK OF IT, "charisma" is another word that's had a pathetic career. First conceived by Max Weber and applying to Moses, Buddha, Jesus, Caesar, Cromwell, and Napoleon, it is now hustled out for any smiling pol able to put together a few applause lines. Both Ronald Reagan and Jesse Jackson have profited from the confusion between charisma and demagoguery. Still, there are some limits: no one has yet said that either George Bush or Mike Dukakis is charismatic.

JACKSON BROUGHT HIS charismatic or demagogic powers onto the Stanford University campus last year. Not for a narrow political purpose, like a rally, but to join in a demonstration against Stanford's mandatory course on Western civilization. The controversy over that academic requirement has been long, complicated, and bitter. There had been at least one sit-in in the effort to get the faculty to acknowledge Toni Morrison as the equal of St. Augustine. It had been hard to keep the arguments from deteriorating into slogans—which are, after all, not the appropriate currency for serious debate over the norms of intellectual life. Universities are fragile fabrics. They have their own logic and their own intrinsic ways of dealing with and resolving serious conflicts. Since Joe McCarthy there has been a justified and honored near-taboo keeping politicians from trying directly to influence their internal lives. But no such inhibition constrains Jesse Jackson. When he marched at Stanford, he shouted the very elevating and illuminating slogan: "Hey, hey, ho, ho . . . Western culture's gotta go." This is the man whom cynical Democrats, fearing him as the vice presidential candidate, are now putting forward to Mike Dukakis as a good nominee for secretary of education.

I SPENT SOME TIME in New York electioneering for Al Gore. Like almost everyone else in the Gore effort, I felt undermined by the malevolent whisper, "A vote for Al Gore is a vote for Jesse Jackson." Al, in fact, was the one who had broken the taboo against criticizing Jackson's positions. In doing so, he breathed the air of honest disagreement into the campaign. Without it, voters who preferred either Dukakis or Gore because they honestly opposed what Jackson stands for in foreign and domestic policy had little protection against the stigma of racism. Dukakis ought to feel himself indebted to Gore for lifting that ugly onus from his victory. And, lo and behold, it now turns out in Pennsylvania that the Duke has actually mentioned some of his own differences with Jesse too. Bravo. However, it is inevitable that Dukakis also won the votes of many thousands of people who dislike Jackson not because of his views or even because of his character, but because of his race. The Dukakis whispering campaign in New York was deftly aimed at such voters. With all the gas Ed Koch has taken for telling it like it is, he did not make himself a party to the "Stop Jackson" panic. That was the work of more genteel folk. Now that it's a two-man race, however, the racists need no instructions.

BESIDES WINNING, Dukakis managed another little victory in New York: he got both Representative Steve Solarz and Representative Charles Schumer to endorse him. Both of these men are old friends of mine, and Schumer is a former student. They both represent Brooklyn in Congress. I don't exactly remember where their mutual dislike comes from, but the rancor deepened when reapportionment threatened to put them into the same district. In any case, maintaining decent relations with both is as difficult as keeping the friendship of a warring couple after a nasty divorce. Earlier in the campaign I had discussed with both Schumer and Solarz the possibility of endorsing Gore. Solarz first backed Paul Simon, but indicated that his clear second choice was Gore, even though his own views seemed closer to Dukakis's. Schumer was torn between Gore and Dukakis but appeared to be tilting to Dukakis, even though his own views were historically closer to Gore's. I couldn't help feeling, during these discussions, that there was a subtext: neither congressman wanted to endorse the same candidate as the other. They waited and jockeyed. Then, just before the express train pulled out of New York they both jumped on. Nothing could be worse than being left behind, not even being in the same coach.

WE HAVE IT from no less a personage than Willie Brown, the California House speaker and Jackson's campaign chairman, that if Jesse does not get the Democratic presidential nod this time he'll be back. "Jackson's 46 years of age. . . . You know, we have four more runs, minimum." That's too much for me to contemplate: let's get it over with this time, one way or another. If Jackson is willing to settle for veep, Dukakis should just let him have it. Jackson would outshine the Duke as a campaigner, of course, but who wouldn't? And Bush will face the same running mate problem.

MARTIN PERETZ

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